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ESSAY

ON

THE HABITUAL EXERCISE

&

OF

LOVE TO GOD,

CONSIDERED

AS A PREPARATION FOR HEAVEN

BY

JOSEPH JOHN GURNEY.

“WE LOVE HIM BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US.” 1 John iv. 19.

Revised under the Sanction of the Author.

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ESSAY.

SECTION I.

GENERAL REMARKS ON MEETNESS FOR THE HEAVENLY STATE.

MUCH of the happiness which is here permitted to man, arises from the exercise of kindly feelings. When benevolence leads us to seek the welfare of others, and our hearts are enlarged in good-will and charity, our condition of mind is unquestionably one of pleasure to ourselves. Again, when the objects of our purest and warmest affections are granted to us—when we enjoy their company and conversation, and when our kindness towards them is met by an equal return—this is a source of unrivalled temporal joy. Nor can it be denied, that the purity and height of this joy are just in proportion to the *moral excellence* of the objects of our love.

These remarks may, perhaps, afford us some faint glimpse of the happiness of those purified spirits in whom love is forever fixed as a predominant principle. The Being to whom their affections are supremely directed is infinitely lovely, showing forth the glorious perfection of every moral beauty; and he now rewards them with the fulness of his favour. While they are brought unspeakably near to him, and enjoy an unclouded view of his righteousness, they know that he is their eternal portion: they can say in truth, "This God is our God forever and ever." Well, therefore, might the sacred writers exclaim, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that LOVE HIM."*

Heaven is the abode of perfect purity and peace. Nothing is there left to separate the soul of man from God, the fountain of his happiness; the promise of pardon has already been realized by its inhabitants; their sins are abolished; Satan tempts and buffets them no longer; the pure affections of the regenerate

* 1 Cor. ii. 9; *comp.* Isa. lxiv. 4.

mind are triumphant in the saints ; and, under the unrestricted influences of the Holy Ghost, they are made partakers of the most exalted communion with the Father and with the Son.

If such is the nature of the joys of heaven, it plainly follows that the wicked are absolutely destitute of a capacity to receive them—the enemies of God cannot breathe that pure and delightful element ! To suppose that a rebel spirit, impregnated with bitterness, and long accustomed to worship *self*, in preference to the Creator and Redeemer, should find its happiness in the full sunshine of the Divine Presence, is to suppose, not only the subversion of retributive justice, but a moral, and even physical impossibility. Whatever may have been the intellectual creed or high profession of such a person, his false confidence must forever fail him ; under the influence of awful terror, he must descend into regions of darkness. In heaven, assuredly, he can have no life, much less enjoyment ; for there all is *light*, and in that light all is *love*.*

* “ My chief conception of heaven,” said Robert Hall to Wilberforce, “ is *rest*.” “ Mine,” replied Wilberforce, “ is *love*—love to God, and love to every bright

“Heaven,” said an eloquent and experienced preacher, “can be no place of happiness to the wicked. Do we not learn from Scripture, that the pleasures of the heavenly state consist in the immediate presence of a holy God and Saviour—in purity—in worship, and perpetual service—in an entire conformity of the will to that of the Deity—in union with him? But every one of these things is here a cross, yea, a cross unbearable to the wicked, who flies from the presence of God, refuses to come to Christ, delights in impure indulgences, shuns both private prayer and public worship, and rebels against the divine law written in Scripture, and engraven on the heart. To such a soul, when disembodied, the joys and exercises of heaven would be impossible; or, if possible, intolerable—even the extremest misery, especially after a long course of degradation, in which the *habit of ungodliness* has been fully formed.”

and happy inhabitant of that glorious place.” Hall was an almost constant sufferer from acute bodily pain; Wilberforce *enjoyed* life, and was all amiability and sunshine; so that it is easy to account for their respective conceptions on this subject. What a mercy that both these conceptions are true!

“*If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.*”* That there is a solemn meaning couched under this simple metaphor, no Christian can doubt. It seems to describe the change so rapidly coming upon us all, of probation for eternal fixedness, when the awful sentence will be heard, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust *still*; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy *still*; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous *still*; and he that is holy, let him be holy *still*.”† But the tree will not only lie as it falls; it will also fall as it *leans*; and the great question which every man ought to bring home to his own bosom, without a moment’s delay, is this—What is the *inclination* of my soul? Does it, with all its affections, lean *towards* God, or *from* him?‡

* Eccl. xi. 3.

† Rev. xxii. 11.

‡ It is observed by a powerful anonymous writer of the present day, that the mixture of good and evil belongs only to this probationary state; and that every spirit separated from the body must, by a sort of natural consequence or physical necessity, fly off on the one side or the other, according as it is affected towards God and

That the *bent* of all men, in their unregenerate state, is in the wrong direction, Scripture, experience, and history unite in bearing testimony. Man by nature is the child of

holiness ; for, in the world to come, there is no further amalgamation between good and evil ; but an irresistible avulsion of the one from the other. “ Of every human spirit it may be said, that it possesses or not that *affection to God* which, when freed from the embarrassments that here surround us, will spring up toward its object—will break away exultant from every defilement—and connect the created to the uncreated Spirit, between which a real alliance had already taken place. Has then the soul, at the moment when its active powers are broken up, and when it is launched upon the severed elements of good and evil, been quickened toward the moral perfections of the Supreme Being ? Has it yet entertained or not the rudiment of love, of loyalty, and of submission to the divine government ? Is it affiliated to God, or is it estranged and in rebellion ? Does it abhor the contamination of its present state ? Has it sympathy with the worship that encircles the throne of the Most High ? Or is it destitute both of the emotions and of the habits of grateful and joyous adoration ? * * * * Is the soul alive to God or not ? *Do we look to him for our pleasures ?* The answers to these questions must discriminate spirit from spirit, when each, in its moral element only, enters the world where moral elements are parted.”—*Saturday Evening*, p. 390.

wrath; he has inherited from his first parents, in the fall, a proneness to sin; and his distinguishing characteristic is the *absence of that love to God* which is absolutely indispensable to true virtue and happiness, both here and hereafter. Hence it follows, beyond all doubt or question, that we must be “born again”—that we must undergo a radical and inward change—before we can live to the glory of God in this world, or be fitted for the enjoyment of his presence in the world to come. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”*

When, therefore, we speak of a *meetness* for the heavenly state, the main object which we must always keep in view, is the “washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” When the apostle thanks God, “who has made us *meet* to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light,” he describes, in the parallel words, the true ground of that meetness—“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath *translated* us into

* John iii. 3. 5.

the kingdom of his dear Son?"* The Spirit of God alone can so rectify the natural dispositions of the depraved heart of man, and so create him anew in Christ Jesus, as to render him capable of a participation in the joys of eternal purity.

If, then, we would attain to a capacity for those pleasures which are at the right-hand of our God forever, we must yield up our souls in ready obedience to the visitations of the Holy Spirit; that his enlightening and enlivening influence may assimilate all within us to its own nature. Now this divine influence—this free gift of God through our Lord Jesus Christ—springs from love, and leads to it. By teaching and enabling us to love God with all our heart, and all our soul, it will prepare us for that kingdom of which *love* is the joy forever.†

* Col. i. 12, 13.

† "The kingdom of heaven," said our Saviour, "is like unto leaven which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." Matt. xiii. 33. I conceive that this parable has a double meaning; that it relates first to the spread of the gospel in the world, and secondly, to the growth of grace in the heart. "As the property of leaven is to change or assimilate to its own nature, the meal or dough with

In effecting this blessed change in the affections of fallen man, the Holy Spirit makes use of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as his grand, appointed instrument. That gospel, written in the Holy Scriptures, and preached by the Lord's messengers, is a spiritual weapon of heavenly mould; and, when wielded by a divine hand, it penetrates the heart, and becomes "the power of God unto salvation." Convinced of sin, humbled under a feeling of its malignity, and broken down into repentance, the sinner often passes through a long and painful season of inward conflict; but at length he finds rest for his soul in the Lord Jesus Christ. His sins are freely forgiven him for the sake of that Redeemer who bore the penalty of them on the cross; "the handwriting of ordinances" which was against him is washed out in the blood of the everlasting covenant; and now, as a reconciled and adopted child, he is

which it is mixed, so the property of the grace of Christ, is to change the whole soul into its own likeness; and God intends that this principle should continue in the soul till all is leavened; till the whole bear the image of the heavenly, as it before bore the image of the earthly.—See *Dr. A. Clarke, Com. in loc.*

brought into a dispensation of *peace* and *love* towards God our Father. Himself the object of divine compassion, he loves God in return; and, under the impulse of gratitude for all his mercies, and especially for the unspeakable gift of *such* a Saviour, he devotes himself without reserve to the service of his Creator.

Such is the genuine character of conversion “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God,” through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And here it may be well for us to remember, to the “praise of the glory” of divine “grace,” that such a change sometimes takes place at the eleventh hour of the day. Such cases as those of the thief on the cross, and of the Earl of Rochester, afford an illustrious evidence, that the sovereign mercy of God contains in itself the grand preparative for immortal glory. They show that it is the means of inspiring—sometimes even at a late and unexpected moment—that deep self-abasement on the one hand, and, on the other, that exalted love and gratitude towards God, by which the soul may be fitted even for the bliss of angels.

But for the most part the Christian’s prepa-

ration for heaven is slow and gradual ; and he ought never to forget that the fruits of the Spirit—especially its most important fruit, *love to God*—must not only be produced, but *ripened* for eternity. Through many a temptation, and many a conflict with the powers of darkness, the work of sanctification must go forward unto the perfect day. The believer must never relax in his efforts : by watchfulness and prayer, by the “ armour of righteousness, on the right hand and on the left,” by the constant exercise of pure affections, he must work out his “ own salvation with fear and trembling.” “ A man must be purified,” said the preacher already cited, “ before he can enjoy eternal purity. He must be accustomed to keep company with Christ here, in order to enjoy, or even to bear, his immediate presence hereafter. He must have learned to draw very near to the throne of grace ; he must be trained by the Spirit to a devotional *habit* of soul, before he can endure the unveiled glory of God’s *perfect holiness*.”

Well, indeed, is the Christian aware that he can contribute nothing to these purposes in his own strength ; but he lives by “ faith in the

Son of God," and follows the guidance of the Holy Spirit:—it is "God," that "worketh" in him, "to will and to do of his good pleasure."* Thus it is that he gradually attains to the experience of the apostolic doctrine, that "if any man be in Christ, it is a new creation;"† "old things are passed away: behold all things are become new"—the "wilderness and the solitary place" are "glad" for him—the "desert" rejoices and blossoms "as the rose!"‡

We may rest assured, that there is not a saint in heaven, who would not say, as the apostle did on earth, "By the grace of God I am what I am." But while our preparation for the heavenly state must be explicitly ascribed to divine grace, we know that this saving influence finds us in a world of probation—a scene of action and of suffering, in which it is the will of our all-wise Creator to *educate* us for eternity. The circumstances in which we are placed, the opportunities afforded us of duty or improvement, our own capacities and faculties, the incitements to virtue and checks upon vice with which we are furnished in the moral government of God, our

* Phil. ii. 12, 13.

† καὶ ἡ κτίσις, 2 Cor. v. 17.

‡ Isa. xxxv. 1.

pleasures and our sorrows, the very taunts and temptations of this wicked world, must all be applied, with watchfulness and prayer, to the great object of our being. In constant dependence on divine grace, we must use them diligently, as so many talents committed to our stewardship : God is ever ready to sanctify them to his faithful and believing children.

It is of especial importance to observe, that, while the believer in Jesus is graciously delivered from the dominion of sin, *he continues to be subject, like other men, to those natural laws which regulate the movements, and form the constitution, of the human mind.* Since these laws belong to the nature which God has given us, and cannot cease to operate—at least in our present state of being—the Christian must not disregard them. On the contrary, he ought to be ever on the watch to maintain their right balance, and to direct their native influence to wise and holy purposes.

It is one of the most remarkable of these laws, that *our passive sensations are weakened by the repetition of impressions, just as our active propensities are strengthened by the repetition of actions.* This law, so uni-

versal in its scope and operation, is a bountiful provision, by which our Heavenly Father alleviates the pains, and facilitates the duties of his creature man. Those who are exposed to a frequent recurrence of pain or sorrow ; those who are reminded, by every surrounding object, of relatives whom they have lost ; those whose callings in life are of an arduous nature ; those whose principles are put to the test by frequently repeated temptation—have all abundant reason to be thankful for this law of our nature. Yet is it a general law. It extends not only to our hurtful and painful impressions, but to others of a beneficial character ; and here it requires to be checked or balanced by the gradual formation and habitual exercise of active principles.

Important indeed is our Lord's precept—
“Take heed how ye hear.”* In his character of a preacher of divine truth, Paul declared himself to be “a savour of death unto death” to some, as well as “of life unto life” to others. The same may be said of that gospel of which he was a minister. If it be not cordially accepted and imbibed—if, time after time, it be

* Luke viii. 18.

resisted, and sin and the world preferred to it—our capacity for profiting from it, will be diminished by every repetition—our death in trespasses and sins will be deepened and confirmed ! ‘Nor ought the religious man to forget that he also has a part in these warnings. The discourses to which he loves to listen, and the passages which he delights to read, will produce less and less effect upon him, unless the lessons presented to him are steadily acted on, and are thus *wrought* into his mental constitution. His purest affections will soon wither, if they be not—under the influence of the Spirit of God—nurtured and matured by *good habit*.

The highest affection of which mankind are capable, is *love to God* ; and this love cannot fail to be excited in our minds when we are quickened by the Spirit to a sense of his goodness. Yet even this affection will be sure to grow cold, if it be not cultivated. Our capacity of being impressed by the ever recurring proofs of God’s benevolence towards us will lessen as they are reiterated : and except this tendency to decay be counteracted by the working of a living principle within us, we

shall soon become liable to that awful rebuke—
“ Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee,
because thou hast *left thy first love*.”* The
soul of the believer must be habituated to ac-
tion; it must maintain a steady energy towards
the sovereign object of its desire: no false rest
must be taken up: it must always be moving
forwards in that holy way which leads to God,
and happiness, and heaven. Then, indeed,
the work of religion will prosper in our expe-
rience. Although the first blaze of fervour,
which often distinguishes the new convert,
may subside into a calm, the pure affection of
love to God will be settled in our souls: it
will imbue and characterize our new nature—
with a perpetual increase of true brightness,
it will burn forever!”† “ Away with these

* Rev. ii. 4.

† The progressive work of religion in the soul may
be illustrated by *water* as well as by *fire*. It is *living*
water that Jesus Christ bestows on those who are athirst
for God: see John iv. 10. “ He calls the grace of the
Holy Spirit *water*,” says Theophylact on this passage,
“ because it cleanses and affords great refreshment to
those who drink it: not *stagnant* water, such as we
find in a corrupt state, in pools and wells, but *living*;
that is, bubbling and leaping up: water in motion. For

filthy garments,” said the pious William Law, when very near his death, “I feel a fire kindled within me, which will consume every thing of a nature contrary to itself, and ascend as a flame of divine love to all eternity !”

the grace of the Spirit excites the soul to perpetual motion towards that which is good—ever disposing it to *ascend*. Paul had drunk of this living and ever-moving water, *when he forgot the things which were behind. and reached forth towards those which were before.*”

SECTION II.

ON THE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD IN NATURE AND PROVIDENCE.

THE preceding remarks are by no means *exclusively* applicable to those overt acts of obedience and service, by which the Christian seeks to glorify the God whom he loves. These occupy their own province—and that province an important one—in the work of preparation for heaven; they react on him who performs them, and confirm the love from which they spring. But there are acts of the *soul alone*, known only to ourselves and to our Creator, which have a strong tendency to impart steadiness and brightness to that flame of affection and gratitude towards God, which burns in the bosom of the believer. The first of these is the *contemplation of God*.

That *love* should excite *love*, is a principle which God has interwoven with our very na-

ture. This principle pervades all our family and social relations, and exercises a mighty influence over every department of human society : but it is called into its best and highest action by the beneficence of God himself. In contemplating *Him* as the supreme object of our love, our attention can scarcely fail to be directed to the precious doctrine, that “he first loved us :” a doctrine plainly manifested to us in the book of *nature* and *providence*.

That this book, so far as relates to the attributes of God, is very imperfectly read without the aid of revelation, the history of mankind affords abundant evidence. We find that evidence in the works of the ancient heathen philosophers, whose views of the Supreme Being were, after all their researches, partial and incomplete. Still more perceptible and glaring is it, among a certain class of modern philosophers, who have *disregarded* Christianity : and who, in the midst of a wondrous development of nature’s secrets, have forgotten and even denied nature’s God. But to contemplate God *in his works*, under the beaming light of the religion of the Bible, is one of the most profitable exercises of the human mind : it can-

not fail to imbue us with filial love and gratitude towards the Author of our being.

If we would love God sincerely and fervently, let us first contemplate him as our *Father by creation*; let us call to mind, that a few years since we *were not*, but now *are*; that we possess not only animal life, but a rational and imperishable soul: and that both are his gift, the spontaneous results of his wisdom, power, and love.

On the gift of our *being*, all his other gifts *to us* are obviously contingent; but let us reflect on the *manner* in which he has formed us—on the capacities of body and mind with which we are endowed. “I will praise thee,” said David, “for I am *fearfully* and *wonderfully* made; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.”*

These words of inspired thanksgiving are in full agreement with the wonders of modern anatomy. What Christian, who knows any thing of these wonders, can consider his own bodily frame, without being *astonished* at the wisdom and goodness of God? The complexity and nicety of the machine; the perfect

* Ps. cxxxix. 14—16.

ease with which it works, every part being made for use and comfort, and no part for pain; the various joints, each of that peculiar mechanism which suits it to its place; the muscles, with their power of contraction for the purpose of motion, and pulling against each other, to keep the body even; the heart, a forcing pump, beating a hundred thousand times in a day, but never growing weary; the blood, forever circulating, fed with chyle in one part of its passage, and enlivened with pure air in another; the conversion of that blood, by some mysterious action, into all the other fluids of the body; the chemistry of the stomach; the sensibility and sightliness of the skin; the organs of sense, each furnished with its own class of nerves, and fitted with the most consummate skill to its peculiar objects; the scientifically formed cavities and tight drum of the ear; the refracting lenses, the directing muscles, the cleansing tears, the protecting lids and lashes, and the pictured retina of the eye—all these, and a multitude of other particulars, are worthy of our grateful meditation, and ought surely to excite both our wonder and our praise.

But how much more admirable is the constitution of the mind, with all its subtle powers of sensation, consciousness, reflection, reasoning, memory, invention, and imagination ! Shall we mark these powers and enjoy their action ; shall we delight ourselves in the facility with which our thoughts range the universe, and not learn to love that bounteous Being who made us what we are ?

But our capacities would be of little worth without corresponding objects ; and we must contemplate the Deity, not only as our Creator, but as the gracious Author of those provisions by which our faculties are excited to action, and all our wants supplied. External nature teems with such provisions ; and the exactness of their suitability to us, affords sufficient evidence, that if man is made for the world, the world is also made for man. Here we may freely mingle the most obvious and familiar observations with the discoveries of modern science ; all combine to multiply our proofs of the benevolence of our heavenly Father. It seems almost needless to advert to particulars ; but the religious man will find abundant cause for gratitude towards his Creator, when he

meditates on the existence and properties of light and heat; on the alternations of day and night; on the arrangement of the seasons; on the nature of the atmosphere; on the magnetic influence directing the mariner's compass; on the even and moderate temperature of the earth's surface; on the universal law of gravitation; on the endless supplies, and multiplied uses, of water; on the ocean, with its faculty of evaporation; on the mighty agency of steam; on the gradual detrition of rocks into fertile soils; on the vast provisions of animal and vegetable food, each zone of the earth producing the kind of aliment which its inhabitants require; on the green carpeting of nature; on the profusion of her flowers; on all her glorious scenery!

Did not the earth turn upon her axis—had she no motion round the sun—was her bulk less or greater than it is—was the law of gravitation reversed—was the atmosphere differently composed, or did it refuse to vibrate so as to convey sound—was light incapable of refraction—did water exist only in the form of ice—had the rocks of the earth's surface never crumbled—was nature destitute of vegetation—

was she clothed in scarlet instead of green—where would be the happiness or even the life of man?

The harmony which is, on a broad scale, so obvious between the *faculties* of man and his *circumstances*, is the general result of innumerable *pairs of things*; every one of which affords a distinct evidence of the goodness of God. Take, for example, the *lungs* and the *air*. Viewed in connexion with the cavity of bones in which they are safely lodged, with their peculiar set of blood-vessels, with their wrapping membrane, with their air-tubes, and with the muscles which keep them in perpetual motion, the lungs present an illustrious example of mechanism adapted to its end. No less remarkable is the chemical science displayed in that peculiar combination of pure and impure gases, which forms the air. The mechanism can have had no tendency to give birth to the chemistry, nor the chemistry to construct the machine; but both are found working together, in perfect harmony, for the health and life of animals. Was either the machinery of the lungs, or the combination of gases in the air, in any respect different from what they now

are, (and different they might have been in ten thousand ways,) all would have been pain and misery, or, perhaps, death, to living creatures. Why, then, are these operations of nature precisely what we find them to be? Why are they thus matched and assorted for our good? Surely, because the hand which formed the lungs, and composed the air, is a hand, not only of unrivalled skill, but of tender mercy.

“These are thy glorious works, Parent of good!
Almighty, thine this universal frame
Thus wondrous fair; thyself how wondrous then!
Unspeakable, who sitt’st above the heavens,
To us invisible, or dimly seen
In these thy lowest works; yet these declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine.”

MILTON.

The gift to man of the inferior animals, for other uses besides food, is another point which ought to excite our gratitude. How great are the benefits which he derives from the camel, the elephant, the dog, the ox, and the horse! What cause has he to be thankful for the hide, the fleece, and the furs of the north, just suited to its frosts! Who can observe a multitude of silk-worms, burying themselves in their own exquisite manufacture; and thus administering to us abundant material, not merely for soft

clothing, but for the wealth of nations,—without admiring the *kindness* of divine Providence?

There is a fitness in the outward creation to the *mental*, as well as to the bodily capacities of man. It is by his mind that he detects the secrets of nature, unfolds her beauties, and, through many an ingenious process, applies her materials to his use. This fact has no tendency to weaken the evidence afforded, by *the supplies of nature*, of the goodness of God. On the contrary, it adds another link, of immense value, to the chain of that evidence. The more we dive into the hidden capabilities of the world in which we dwell, and multiply, by science or art, our own means of comfort and happiness—the larger will be our proof of the goodness of God; the stronger his claim upon ourselves, for gratitude and love.

But while God causes his sun to shine, and his rain to fall on the just and on the unjust, his reconciled and obedient children alone are, in one sense, the *true* inheritors of the earth. “All things are theirs; because they are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” The Christian is in possession of a touchstone by which he can apply every thing around him to his soul’s benefit; he knows how to appropriate even the *charms* of nature.

“His are the mountains, and the valleys his,
And the resplendent rivers ; his t’ enjoy
With a propriety which none can feel,
But who, with filial confidence inspired,
Can lift to heaven an unpresumptuous eye,
And smiling say, ‘ My Father made them all !’
Are they not his, by a peculiar right,
And by an emphasis of interest his,
Whose eye they fill with tears of holy joy,
Whose heart with praise, and whose exalted mind,
With worthy thoughts of that unwearied LOVE
That plann’d and built, and still upholds a world
So clothed with beauty, for rebellious man ?”

COWPER.

There is, however, another ground on which the Christian possesses peculiar advantage, in contemplating God as the Author of nature. He is taught in the Scriptures, that, while God is infinite in power, and perfect in wisdom, he is himself a blind earth-worm—the very child of darkness and ignorance. He meets, therefore, only with *what he expects*, when he finds himself checked and limited, on every side, in his investigation of natural things—when he discovers that there is in the material works of God, a magnitude on the one hand, and a minuteness on the other, which defy all

his powers both of inquiry and conception. Again, while he can love and praise the God of nature, for his innumerable bounties, he never thinks of regarding this lower world as the scene of uninterrupted enjoyment and repose. He knows that it is a fallen world, deeply injured by sin; and that death and destruction are now permitted, for wise purposes, to range over its surface. His faith in the goodness of God, therefore, is in no degree unsettled by the poisonous herb or the rattlesnake, by the fangs of the tiger or the vulture, by the storm, the earthquake, or the pestilence. While he accepts with gratitude the satisfactions afforded him by visible things, he can be thankful even for those *checks and interruptions* which remind him that his present life is but a vapour—that he is only a pilgrim on his journey to another world, where sorrow, suffering, sin, and death are no more.

Yet it ought not to be forgotten, that in the gifts which she bestows, and the deprivations or dangers which she inflicts, nature maintains a system of balance and compensation—a system which plainly evinces both

the wisdom and kindness of her Almighty Author.

“Liberal, not lavish, is kind nature’s hand ;
Nor was perfection made for man below.
Yet all her schemes with nicest art are plann’d,
Good counteracting ill, and gladness woe.
With gold and gems if Chilian mountains glow—
If bleak and barren Scotia’s hills arise—
There plague and poison, lust and rapine grow ;
Here peaceful are the vales, and pure the skies ;
And freedom fires the soul, and sparkles in the eyes.”

BEATTIE.

Again, there is every reason to believe, that God governs his material universe by *general laws* ; and, although these laws may, in particular cases, be the occasion of suffering, there can be no doubt that they are, on the whole, productive of enjoyment to his living creatures, as well as of his own glory. We may, indeed, conclude, that no *other laws* could be equally efficacious for these purposes. While, therefore, the Christian is taught to trace all suffering to *sin*, as its original cause, he can admire the wisdom and loving-kindness of God, in establishing a method of government over nature, of which the *main*

tendency is still unquestionably found to be happy and beneficial.

Among the choicest blessings of the God of nature, must be reckoned our *social affections*, considered in connexion with their appropriate objects—the *social relations*. The two, together, are productive of a vast amount of comfort and happiness, even in this uncertain and sorrowful world; and they afford a clear evidence of the loving-kindness of Jehovah, towards his rational creature man. How often do they alleviate the miseries of the wretched, and check the cruelties of the depraved; and how sweet are the pleasures which they impart to the more amiable and virtuous among mankind! Yet even these, the fairest flowers which earth produces, bloom but to die; and nothing can supply the void which the loss of them occasions, but the elevated hopes of the Christian believer. To him, the proof which the social affections present of the benevolence of our Creator, is wonderfully enhanced and strengthened; because, when they are *sanctified*, they produce a ten-fold happiness. Being brought into subordination to the love of God, they now occupy

their *right* province; they are at once confirmed and *refined*; above all, they act in harmony with higher things, and are blended with that fellowship in the gospel of Christ, which shall endure forever.

If we derive material aid from the Christian revelation, in contemplating God as the Author of nature, that aid is still more essential when we consider him in the order of his *providence*, and as the *moral* Governor of the world. The Christian, who knows that his Redeemer has “brought life and immortality to light by the gospel,” is alone in *full* possession of the key which unlocks the mysteries of natural religion. If the tendency of vice to produce misery, and of virtue to generate happiness, is here liable to many interruptions—the Scriptures assure us, on divine authority, that in an unseen and awful future, that tendency will accomplish its end, and will finally triumph over every obstruction.

“Enough for us to know that this dark state,
In wayward passions lost and vain pursuits,—
This infancy of being,—cannot prove
The final issue of the works of God,

By boundless love and perfect wisdom formed,
And ever rising with the *rising mind*."

THOMSON.

In the mean time, the *Christian* can study the page of history, and observe the events which are rapidly passing in this dark world of change, with instruction to his own mind, and thankfulness to God.* There is a light upon his mind, which often reveals to him the traces of the righteousness of Jehovah, in the rise and fall of empires, in the changes of their political relations, in public prosperity or ad-

* The language of the christian's heart is beautifully expressed by Cowper :

" Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,

" But trust him for his grace ;

" Behind a frowning Providence,

" He hides a smiling face.

" His purposes will ripen fast,

" Unfolding every hour ;

" The bud may have a bitter taste,

" But sweet will be the flower.

" Blind unbelief is sure to err,

" And scan his work in vain ;

" God is his own interpreter,

" And he will make it plain."

versity, in the infliction of barrenness on one part of the earth, or in the gift of fertility to another. Yet if those traces are hidden, it is enough for him to remember that God, who sets up one, and puts down another, and disposes of all the nations of the earth as he pleases, is a being of infinite wisdom and goodness, and doeth all things well.

There are, however, three points in the order of Providence, which are peculiarly calculated to excite our gratitude. The *first* is the long-suffering and *sparing* mercy, so often and so largely extended to the guilty races of men. How often has the march of the invader been prevented—or the pestilence stayed in its course—or the threat of famine permitted to subside—for the benefit of nations deeply involved in guilt, that there might yet be space given them for repentance towards God! The *second* is the gradual, yet certain, advance in the world, of civilization and useful knowledge; an advance which affords a wondrous play to the faculties of mankind, and multiplies our comforts and enjoyments on every side. The *third* and principal, is the marked subserviency of events to the diffusion of divine

truth—to “the furtherance of the gospel” of our Lord Jesus Christ. By the obvious tendency of many things now passing in the world, as well as by the words of prophecy, the Christian is encouraged to look forward with hope to an approaching day, when peace and righteousness shall abound in a far greater degree than at present ; when “they shall no longer hurt nor destroy” in all the Lord’s “holy mountain.”

But the goodness of an ever-present, ever-ruling God, is joyfully traced by the *believer*, in little circumstances, as well as in great events. How often, during the course of our pilgrimage, have we reason to bless him for that especial providence by which our sufferings are alleviated, and our wants supplied ! How many are the minute turning points in our lives—the mere accidents, as some persons would call them—which are afterwards found to have been fraught with important consequences, both for our temporal and spiritual welfare !

O ! who shall say how great the plan
Which this day’s incident began ?

Too small, perhaps, the slight occasion
For our dim-sighted observation ;
It pass'd unnoticed, as the bird,
That cleaves the liquid air unheard,
And yet may prove, when understood,
The harbinger of endless good."

COWPER.

In the texture of every man's history there may be said to be a *warp* and a *woof*. There is the ordinary course of our experience, belonging to our condition and calling in life, regulated by known laws, natural and moral, and capable, to a great extent, of being calculated beforehand. This is the warp. There are also a multitude of incidental events which, like the woof, or cross-threads of the weaver, bear *laterally* upon us, and arise out of endless and ever-varied trains of causes, of which we know almost nothing—originating, it may be, in some idle word or thoughtless action, of some unknown person, whose mortal existence has been closed for centuries. Yet these apparently stray circumstances often intersect our path, just at such a time, and just in such a manner, as enable them to serve the most beneficial purposes. How perfect must be the

skill and wisdom of that omniscient Being who wields this infinitely intricate machinery, often inclines its forces in answer to prayer, and never fails to apply them to the highest advantage of his believing and obedient children!* “Whoso is wise, and will *observe* these things, even they shall understand the *loving-kindness* of the Lord.”†

Nor can Christians forget, that the roughest discipline to which they are here subjected, is ordained in mercy for their highest good—“Whom the Lord *loveth* he chasteneth.” They are taught of him to welcome sorrow as the means of their purification; and they are not left to suffer from it without support; the Comforter is with them: the celestial city is in their view, and the sunshine of Christianity illuminates their darkest hours. Religion alone can enable us to “count it all joy” when we fall into divers temptations, (i. e. afflictions.)‡ “We glory in tribulations also;” said a much afflicted apostle, “knowing that tribulation

* See *Natural History of Enthusiasm—on Providence.*

† Ps. cvii. 43.

‡ James i. 2.

worketh patience ; and patience, experience ; and experience, hope.”*

But the spiritual use of affliction is by no means confined to the further purification of *believers*. Often is it made the means of arresting the *wanderer* in his course, and of reminding him, like the prodigal in the parable, of his Father’s house. Many a child of God can say with David, “ Before I was afflicted, I went astray ; but now have I kept thy word.”† Many a careless sinner, under the softening touch of sickness or sorrow, has given way to the influence of divine grace ; has been broken down into penitence ; and has at length found refuge and peace at the feet of Jesus.‡

The sinfulness of mankind, from which all our sorrows spring, is itself the Christian’s greatest sorrow. Resigned as he is to the hidden purposes of God in permitting its exist-

* Rom. v. 3—5.

† Ps. cxix. 67.

‡ At the feet of Jesus only can our sorrows be converted into joy.

“ ’Tis joy enough, my all in all,
At thy dear feet to lie ;
Thou wilt not let me lower fall,
And none can higher fly.”

COWPER.

ence, he can often say with Jeremiah, "For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?——Oh! that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people."* Yet even the wickedness of the world in which we live, is overruled to the advantage of the children of God; for by their resistance, through divine aid, of the temptations to which that wickedness exposes them, their souls are strengthened in *virtue*, and are gradually prepared for eternal purity. So also their *faith* is disciplined and put to the proof, by the darkness and infidelity which surround them, and comes forth the brighter and stronger for the trial.

Thus it appears, that in contemplating God in his providence, the Christian discovers innumerable reasons for loving that gracious Being *who first loved us*; but if we would

* Jer. viii. 21, 22; ix. 1.

rightly love the Creator and Moral Governor of the world, we must not fix our attention on his benevolence as an insulated attribute. The love which would be excited in the rational objects of his bounty, by the kindness of an *unholy being*, could never be of that pure and exalted character which Christianity claims for *our love to God*. In order to the production of this noble affection, in its genuine strength and purity, the benevolence of God, and his love towards ourselves, must ever be regarded in connexion with his *holiness*. What a blessing is it, then, that even in his perceptible government over the world, God proclaims himself, by a multitude of indications, to be on the side of virtue! What a blessing, that his holiness is established beyond the possibility of a doubt, by that rule of moral right, which, in characters more or less legible, he has condescended to write, by his Spirit, on the hearts of all men!

It is in the Holy Scriptures, however, that the theology of nature is *cleared* and *confirmed*. There the Creator and Ruler of the universe is presented to our view in the true majesty of his character; and his attributes,

both natural and moral, are developed in amazing splendour: they are also described in their individual distinctness, as well as in their union—as blended, but not confused. Let us, then, under the guidance of prophets and apostles, learn to contemplate God as our Father—a Spirit, eternal, omnipotent, all-wise, omnipresent, the searcher of all hearts, just, true, faithful, merciful, and holy; let us remember that he is love! Then, surely, if our own dispositions be but rectified by his grace, we shall not fail to love Him, who is *infinitely lovely*; we shall adore him in all his glorious perfections. Our love for God will not only be strong, but reverential; not only ardent, but pure.

SECTION III.

ON THE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD, IN REDEMPTION.—THE FATHER.

STILL more completely than the provisions of nature fall in with our bodily state, and supply our temporal wants—still more properly than the air agrees with the functions of the lungs, and the light with those of the eye—does the gospel of our Redeemer *suit* the spiritual condition of man. We are a fallen race, alienated from God by our sins, justly liable to his wrath; in the gospel we have pardon, peace, and restoration. “Christ made all things new,” says Grotius, “and the latter creation is *more divine* than the former.”* If, then, the first creation of mankind, and all the bounties of nature, are the result of love, that attri-

* Com. on Eph. iii. 9.

bute is far more gloriously displayed in the scheme of *redemption*, and in the work of *grace*.

In the development of this plan of mercy, God has been pleased to make himself manifest to us in the mysterious union and distinction of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Do we desire that divine love should burn brightly within us ? Then let us fix our souls on the amazing scene ; let us *contemplate* the love of the Father, the love of the Son, and the love of the Spirit !*

* The following lines are said to have been written by a person commonly esteemed an *absolute idiot*. A ray from the sanctuary, revealing the mercies of redemption, as well as of creation, must surely have gleamed across his darkness ;—

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
Were the whole earth of parchment made ;
Were every single stick a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade ;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretch'd from sky to sky.

The love of GOD the FATHER is ever represented in Scripture as the origin of all our hopes—as the eternal, unfathomable spring of the waters of life and salvation; and this love is plainly described as extending to the *whole world*. “God so loved *the world*, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* “God was in Christ, reconciling *the world* unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.”† “God would have *all men* to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of his truth.”‡ “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else.”§

Do we inquire for an overwhelming evidence of the love of God? Let the apostle satisfy our inquiry.—“In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”|| Do

* John iii. 16. † 2 Cor. v. 19. ‡ 1 Tim. ii. 4.

§ Isa. xlv. 22.

|| 1 John iv. 9, 10.

we ask, whether God thus loved the whole or only part, of mankind? Let the same apostle answer: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the *whole world*."* He tasted "death for *every man*;"† he "gave himself a ransom *for all*."‡

"If through the offence of one [the] many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto [the] many."§ Even the Gentiles, who were without the benefit of an outward revelation, were by no means destitute of an inward knowledge of the law of God: and some of them showed "*the work of the law written in their hearts*, their conscience also bearing witness."|| Christ is "the true light which lighteth *every man that cometh into the world*."¶ Hence we may reasonably infer, that, as God appointed the death of Christ

* 1 John ii. 1, 2. † Heb. ii. 9. ‡ 1 Tim. ii. 6

§ Rom. v. 15, αἱ πολλοὶ—τοὺς πολλούς. These expressions appear to mean the whole multitude of mankind.

|| Rom. ii. 15.

¶ John i. 9.

to be a sacrifice for the sins of the *whole world*, so all men receive, *through Christ*, a measure of moral and spiritual light, and all have their day of gracious visitation. If the light, in numberless instances, is extremely faint—if the darkness fails to comprehend it—we may rest in the conviction, that God is not only just, but equitable; and that those who know not their Master's will and do it not, “shall be beaten with *few stripes*.”* In the mean time, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, is intended for the benefit of the whole world. It is adapted to men of every condition, clime, and character; all are invited to avail themselves of its benefits; all who *will come may come*, “and take the water of life freely.”†

* Luke xii. 48.

† Rev. xxii. 17.

† “Plenteous grace with thee is found,

Grace to pardon every sin;

Let the healing streams abound,

Make and keep me pure within;

Thou of life the Fountain art,

Freely let me take of thee,

Spring thou up within my heart,

Rise to all eternity.”

WESLEY.

Gurney.

In contemplating the redeeming mercy of God our Father, it is of peculiar importance that we should keep in view its “*breadth* and *length*,” as well as its “*depth* and *height*,”* Great will be our own loss, if we are found ascribing unauthorized limits to the liberality of our God—to the various modifications, and incomprehensible scope, of his love in Christ Jesus. Who, indeed, shall dare to assert, that the love which induced the Creator of the universe to send his Son into the world to die on the cross, does not extend to an infinite number of rational beings, beyond the boundaries of this narrow sphere? Who shall deny that it was his gracious purpose—for reasons and on principles unknown to us—to reconcile unto himself, by the blood of Jesus, “things in heaven,” as well as “things in earth”†—yea, to “gather together in one, *all things* in Christ?”‡

While, however, we embrace these large views of the love of God in Christ Jesus, we have abundant reason to thank our Heavenly Father for those *especial* mercies, of which

* Eph. iii. 18.

† Col. i. 20.

‡ Eph. i. 10.

Christians are the objects ! Jesus is himself the *elect* of God*—the corner-stone of his church, *elect*, precious†—and all who truly believe in him as their Saviour, are *elect in him*, “according to the foreknowledge of God” our Father.‡ They are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.”§ The love of God, which has flowed towards them, from all eternity, in a channel of unrivalled depth, is now “shed abroad” in their “hearts”—a blessed evidence of their present acceptance, and of their future glory.|| To them, with an emphasis far exceeding the claims of ancient Israel, may be applied the solemn words of Jehovah—“I have loved thee with an *everlasting love*; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.”¶

The cords by which the Father draws us to the Son,** are cords of *love*. No man whose “fallow ground” is broken up, and who has truly come in faith to Christ, as his Saviour, will refuse to acknowledge that his conversion is of grace alone, a result of the compassion

* Isa. xlii. 1.

† 1 Pet. ii. 6.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 2.

§ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

|| Rom. v. 5.

¶ Jer. xxxi. 3.

** John vi. 44.

and beneficence of God, effected by his Holy Spirit. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but *according to his mercy*, he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by *his grace*, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”* “Behold what manner of *love* the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.”† Thus can the believer in Jesus say with Hezekiah—“Thou hast *in love to my soul* delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.”‡

The claims of our Heavenly Father on the gratitude of mankind, are immensely enhanced by a single consideration—that his love and favour are bestowed on those, who are not only utterly destitute of merit, but are condemned to death, as transgressors, by the righteous sentence of his law. He sent his Son into the world to save *sinners*; and every sinner who

* Tit. iii. 5—7.

† 1 John iii. 1.

‡ Isa. xxxviii. 17; *comp.* Ps. cxvi. 1—8.

repents and believes, is a brand plucked, by a hand of infinite compassion, from everlasting burnings.* “God commendeth his love to us, in that, while *we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us.”† “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even *when we were dead in sins*, hath quickened us together with Christ.”‡

The sinfulness of man is indeed the ground on which the love of God towards us assumes the peculiar character of *mercy*—“I will be *merciful* to their unrighteousness, saith the Lord, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”§ Mercy is more than simple benevolence; it is kindness bestowed on persons who deserve punishment, and are involved in distress. Behold yon wretched criminal about to be led to execution, and trembling in the view of the scaffold—the royal pardon arrives, and in a moment he is free! This is *mercy*; and just the same in its nature, though infinitely higher in its import and degree, is the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

* Zech. iii. 2. † Rom. v. 8. ‡ Eph. ii. 4, 5.

§ Heb. viii. 12; comp. Jer. xxxi. 34; Luke i. 77, 78, &c.

All who repent of their sins, turn away from their iniquities, and believe in Jesus, are the objects of this mercy. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to them ; they “ are justified by faith, without the deeds of the law ; ”* and being reconciled unto God, through the blood of the covenant, they are now the objects of his unfailing love. Walking in the light of his truth, and proving their faith by their obedience, they enjoy a blessed communion with the Father of Spirits ; and so long as they continue in a state of watchful dependence upon him, nothing can deprive them of his favour and protection. “ Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb ? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee : behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands ; thy walls are continually before me.”† “ If a man love me,” said Jesus, “ he will keep my words ; *and my Father will love him*, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”‡ And again, in his prayer for his disciples—“ that

* Rom. iii. 28. † Isa. xlix. 15, 16. ‡ John xiv. 23.

the world may know that thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me that the *love wherewith thou hast loved me* may be in them, and I in them.”*

Since the love of the Father towards the Son is here represented as the *standard* of his love towards all who follow Jesus, we cannot marvel at the apostle Paul’s persuasion—“that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”†

While the love of God towards his believing and obedient children is abundantly manifested by his protecting care, and by all the rich provisions of his bounty—none of these benefits is worthy of being compared with inward and spiritual *grace*. By his grace he brings the soul into greater and greater degrees of purity, and thus prepares it for a final union with himself; and although it may often be administered through the channel of sorrow and suffering,

* John xvii. 23—26.

† Rom. viii. 38, 39.

the Christian can acknowledge that all is *tender mercy* still !

Finally, this “darling attribute” of our heavenly Father, as Bishop Horne emphatically calls it,* is carried forth into its fulness—like a river into its ocean—when the present scene of conflict is exchanged for a blessed eternity. “Whom he justified, them he also *glorified*.”† “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an *inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*; reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.”‡ Everlasting life is the glorious result of the whole process of mercy.—“‘They shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my *special treasure*;§ and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him !’”

Now whether we contemplate the love of

* Com. on Ps. xxii.

† Rom. viii. 30.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 3—5.

§ Mal. iii. 17, in margin; Heb. מְלִיכָה

God our Father, in the free offers of salvation made to the whole world; or in the election of his universal church according to foreknowledge; or in the effectual working of his grace for the conversion of sinners; or in their justification by faith; or in the riches of his favour towards them when justified; or in the work of sanctification; or in the final glory and happiness of the saints—the grand evidence, and only adequate measure of his love, is the gift of his ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON.

That all the blessings bestowed on mankind, both temporal and spiritual, flow through the medium of the eternal Word, by whom God made the worlds, will probably be allowed by all who accept the Scriptures as divine; but this doctrine applies, with peculiar force, to the privileges and hopes of Christian believers. In Him, and in Him alone, they are chosen, accepted, pardoned, cleansed, and finally glorified; in Him they are the objects of unutterable love, and the receivers of countless benefits—light, wisdom, knowledge, purity, patience, comfort in affliction, joy in the Holy Ghost, and safety

both temporal and eternal. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also, freely give us *all things*?”*

In order to form some conception of our heavenly Father’s love, and of the incomprehensible depth and height of this its only measure, we must accustom ourselves to reflect on the glory and virtue of the Son, who dwelt from everlasting in the Father’s bosom;† on the infinite strength of that love where-with the Father loved him before the foundation of the world‡—when he “was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him;”§ on the reciprocity which subsists between them, seeing that all things which the Son hath are the Father’s, and all things which the Father hath are the Son’s;|| on their perfect union in counsel, in affection, in power, and in nature¶—in short, on the plain doctrine of Scripture, that, with the Holy Spirit, they are ONE GOD. Thus, and thus only, can our

* Rom. viii. 32.

† John i. 18.

‡ John xvii. 24.

§ Prov. viii. 30.

|| John xvi. 15; xvii. 10; *comp.* Matt. xi. 27.

¶ John x. 27—30; xiv. 9.

minds be raised to any adequate estimate of that compassion toward our fallen race, which dictated the awful decree, “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is MY FELLOW, saith the LORD OF Hosts.”*

While the connexion subsisting between the Father and the Son, is unspeakably near and glorious—far beyond the limits of our knowledge and experience—the language of Scripture *invites* our illustrating the subject, by depicting to ourselves the fellowship of a human father, with his beloved and only son. Call to mind the intimacy and pleasantness of this peculiar relation; consider how its delights are increased just in the degree in which both parent and child abound in virtue; imagine the willing obedience and ever-springing love of the child on the one hand, and the cherishing affection of the father on the other; and then conceive, that for the restoration and welfare of some unhappy race of rebels, such a father gives up such a son, as a voluntary sufferer, *unto death*.

The compassion towards that guilty com-

* Zech. xiii. 7

munity which could prompt such a surrender on the part of their prince, must be of a deep and ardent character indeed. Should it, however, appear that this sacrifice was a divinely appointed means, and the only conceivable one, of reconciling mercy with justice, and of establishing the inviolable sanctity of the law of righteousness throughout his dominions, the whole event would exhibit such a union of forgiveness and purity, as would claim not only the fervent love, but the profound respect of the pardoned multitude. Their grateful sense of the mercy of their king, could not fail to be mingled with an awful abhorrence of their crime, and of themselves as criminals.

Such precisely is the practical result of the scheme of redemption. By appointing the Son of his bosom, the partner of his glory, to take our nature upon him, and to die on the cross, as an atonement for guilty man, God has not only "declared" his mercy, but his "*righteousness*, for the forgiveness of sins that are past."* While he freely justifies the believer in Jesus, he maintains his own

* Rom. iii. 25, 26.

justice inviolate, and suffers not the abstraction even of one jot or tittle from the demands of his holy law. In the dispensation of the gospel, the mercy of God is indeed gloriously displayed. But, at the same time, a seal of the most sublime and authoritative character is stamped on the righteousness of the law; on the sinfulness of sin; on the indispensable necessity of virtue; on the spotless purity of heavenly things. When, therefore, we contemplate God our Father, in the redemption of the world—if the Spirit bless our meditations—the affection excited in our hearts will be that of love *tempered with awe*; our gratitude will flow in a stream at once deep and undefiled; and while we rejoice in his compassions, we shall listen to his high behest: “Be ye holy, for I AM HOLY.”

There is nothing by which the religion of the Bible is more remarkably distinguished from every system of man’s invention, than by the first and great commandment of the law: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”* Here is the first of all

* Deut. vi. 5.

moral obligations, and the foundation of all right practice. Now, if this commandment was sustained under the legal dispensation—if even the ancient Israelites knew enough of the mercies of God to be furnished with motives to obey it—with what prodigious force must it press on the mind of the Christian believer! Those who know that they are indebted to the Father for the unspeakable gift of his only-begotten Son, may well feel themselves constrained to love him, with all their heart, and soul, and might. No divided affections can possibly meet his claims upon their gratitude. Won and subdued by the strength and tenderness of his compassion, they must desire nothing but to be *his* entirely, and *his* forever.

But, in loving God, we must love him as he is—a Being of infinite purity and righteousness. His moral attributes must all be dear to us; and we must not only love *him*, but love *his law*, which is at once the rule of our lives, and the transcript of *his* character. A hatred of sin, and an ardent desire after holiness, must ever mark the disposition and conduct of the Lord's children. If David

could say : “ O how love I thy law ! it is my meditation all the day ; . . . thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever : for they are the rejoicing of my heart”^{*}—the follower of Jesus, in every age, ought surely to breathe in the same spirit, and to burn with the same ardour. If the ancient Israelites were commanded to talk of the Lord’s precepts when they sat in their houses, or walked by the way, and when they lay down, and when they rose up ; to teach them diligently to their children ; to bind them for a sign upon their hand, and for frontlets between their eyes ; to write them on their door-posts and on their gates[†]—much more is the Christian bound, by every tie of gratitude, to love and obey them—to guard and cherish them as his dearest treasure.

Finally, if, under a humbling sense of his mercy, we truly love God and love his law ; we shall heartily endeavour to promote his glory. Our rejoicing will be in remembrance of his infinite blessedness ; while it will be our highest happiness to exalt his holy name—“ to administer to the display of his goodness

^{*} Ps. cxix. 97. 111.

[†] Deut. vi. 6, 7.

and greatness.”* The supreme object of our ardent and disinterested affection, *He* will be our *end* in all things !

* “The true servants of God feel that the best end of their being is fulfilled, if they administer to the display of the divine goodness and greatness ; and that it is the grand office and privilege of creatures to exalt their all-perfect Creator and Father, and to experience an entire annihilation of themselves, in the contemplation of his excellencies, and the desire of promoting his honour and praise.”—*Love to God Considered*, by James Joyce, 3d edition, p. 60.

SECTION IV.

ON THE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD, IN REDEMPTION.—THE SON.

“MY heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee forever.”* Such were the glowing words poured forth by the psalmist, when his harp was tuned to the praises of Emmanuel. The love of Christ is indeed an animating subject, full of joy and sublimity; and to dwell on its principal features, under the guidance of Scripture, must be regarded as one of our happiest privileges. When such are our reflec-

* Ps. xlv. 1, 2.

tions, we may well say with David—"In the multitude of my thoughts within me, *thy comforts* delight my soul."^{*}

1. In the first place, the Christian ought ever to keep in mind, that the Son of God was not the unwilling victim of the righteousness of the law, but a co-operator with the Father, in the scheme of justice and mercy. His humiliation and sufferings, although undergone in obedience to his Father's command, were also voluntary as it regarded himself; and in the Holy Scriptures, they are ascribed indifferently to the Father's love, and to *his own*. "Hereby perceive we the love (of God†) because he laid down his life for us."[‡] "*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*"§ "Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet

* Ps. xciv. 19.

† Or of Christ.

‡ 1 John iii. 16.

§ John xv 9. 13.

smelling savour.”* “Christ also *loved the church*, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word ; that he might present it to himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”† “Unto Him that *loved us* and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father ; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.”‡ “Let this *mind* be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but *made himself* of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”§ Great as is the happiness of knowing the love of Christ, we must freely

* Eph. v. 2.

† Eph. v. 25—27.

‡ Rev. i. 5, 6 ; *comp.* Gal. ii. 20.

§ Phil. ii. 5—8.

confess with the apostle, that it “*passeth knowledge.*”

2. In order, however, to form some proper conception of it, let us contemplate that original glory and blessedness which the Son of God surrendered, for our sakes, when he came into the world, and was made “a little lower than the angels.” “And now, O Father,” said Jesus in his prayer, “glorify thou me with thine own self with *the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*”* The glory which the Son enjoyed with the Father before the world was, was the glory of God himself. He was in “the form of God,” subsisting in the nature of the Deity, and arrayed in his characteristic attributes—“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”† “By him,” also, “all things were made, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”‡

Thus he “thought it not robbery to be equal with God,”—that is, to be an equal object with him, of honour and adoration. For him, as well as for the Father, ascended the anthems of

* John xvii. 5.

† John i. 1.

‡ John i. 3.

the new creation. Before them both, in the unity of the Godhead, arose perpetually from the angelic host, the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and the incense of praise. Such was the glory—such the infinite majesty—from which the Son of God *reduced himself*,* when he veiled his deity in manhood.

But the condition of our blessed Redeemer, before his incarnation, was one not only of divine majesty, but of perfect *bliss*. He was “with God,”—inconceivably near to the fountain of all happiness, dwelling in the Father’s bosom, the object of his unbounded love; “rejoicing always before him;” partaking, without limits, of the river of his pleasures. Yet from these unutterable joys he *abstained* for our benefit, and became “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”

3. “Great is the mystery of godliness,—God was manifest *in the flesh*.”† That he who is one in essence with the Father—himself, therefore, *Jehovah* the Creator and Sovereign of the universe—should take upon him

* Phil. ii. 7. ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσας—reduced, or *emptied* himself.”

† 1 Tim. iii. 16.

“ the seed of Abraham,” and the nature of man ; that he should become the brother of his people, and be made, *in all points*, like unto his brethren, sin only excepted ; that he should subject himself, in a human body and soul, to the limits and infirmities of our species—to the weakness of man’s birth, and to the painfulness of his death—is an example of condescension and unbounded charity, which the mind of man may contemplate with silent adoration, but can never fully grasp. The act of self-renunciation would have been infinite, even had he come as the Jews expected him, in the form of an earthly monarch. But, behold, he selects for himself an humble station, and a life of poverty. His birth-place is a stable ; his cradle a manger ; his early home a Galilean village, his mother a virgin, royally descended indeed, but of a low estate ; his reputed father a mechanic. Soon he becomes a wanderer in deserts and caves of the earth, and “ though the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”*

* Matt. viii. 20.

When his followers would make him a king, he finds his refuge in a wilderness; he prefers the form of a servant; he ministers to his brethren; he washes his disciples' feet. In the mean time, an ungodly people refuse to believe his word; his miracles are traced to Beelzebub: he is despised and rejected—the object of unbridled hatred, insult and mockery. He gives his back “to the smiters,” and his cheeks to them that “pluck off the hair;” he hides not his face “from shame and spitting.”* Finally, the shameless cry is raised against him—“Crucify him! crucify him!” Having made himself of no reputation, he humbles himself yet further—even “unto death;” and the death to which he submits is a public execution, in the form which was appointed for the vilest malefactors.

4. Such were the depths of humiliation to which he descended; but who shall tell the sufferings which he endured? Persons of great refinement of mind are often found to be peculiarly susceptible of pain, even in body; and it is impossible to say in how great a de-

* Isa. l. 6.

gree the most endowed and refined of all human spirits was alive to the sufferings of its mortal tabernacle. “His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.”* There can be no question that our blessed Lord suffered grievously from weariness, watching, and fasting; from the scourge so wantonly inflicted before his crucifixion; from burning thirst upon the cross, when his cruel enemies gave him “gall mingled with vinegar” to drink; from the piercing of his hands and feet; from the slow yet intense agonies of his dying hours, while the whole weight of his body was resting on those tortured parts. The thought of these things, and of each particular amongst them, ought to move every heart to tenderness; for he was “wounded for *our* transgressions”—by “his stripes *we* are healed.” “I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications, (saith the Lord,) and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his

* Isa. lii. 14.

only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.”* Yet the marring of our Lord’s countenance might doubtless be traced chiefly to the sorrows of his *soul*. “My *soul*,” said he, “is exceeding sorrowful, *even unto death*.”†

The capacities of man for every description of right feeling are miserably weakened by the fall; and it is only as we experience a restoration to the image of our God, that they again assume their native and original vigour. On this principle it is in various respects true, that holiness and *sensibility to sorrow* go hand in hand and keep pace with each other. The greater advances we make towards divine purity, the more acute becomes our sympathy with the woes of other men, the deeper our distress because of the sinfulness of the world, and the more painful to our feelings those temptations of the devil, with which we are ourselves assailed.

Now we know that our blessed Lord, although clothed in the nature of man, was absolutely free from the moral taint of the fall;

* Zech. xii. 10.

† Matt. xxvi. 30.

in him there was no selfishness—no spot or stain of sin, in word or deed, in thought or imagination. How unspeakably tender and acute, therefore, must have been his sympathy with an afflicted generation, when he bare the “sickness” and carried the “sorrows” of the people; when he wept over the grave of Lazarus, and mourned the impending fate of Jerusalem! What frequent horror and conflict of mind must have been his lot, while he continued in personal contact with a world of traitors and sinners! What grief and anxiety must have assailed him, when, in the view of the vice and irreligion of his countrymen, he could say, “the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up!” and again, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you!”

Above all, however, the sorrow of his soul must have been strange and peculiar indeed, during those forty days and nights of fasting and solitude, when he was himself exposed to the insidious assaults of Satan. That He, in whom there was no sin, should thus become liable to temptation—that the prince of darkness should be permitted to come in upon him

like a flood—that Satan should dare to suggest to that holy incarnate One, the undue indulgence of appetite, the gratification of worldly ambition, and the sin of presumption towards God—is a mystery which no man can unravel. But one point in connexion with it is abundantly clear; namely, that the anguish of spirit produced by these temptations in the mind of Jesus, must have been in exact proportion to his hatred of sin—on a perfect level with his immaculate purity.

It is an instructive circumstance, that the sufferings which Jesus underwent during the course of his life and ministry, were endured with *long-continued patience*. Aggravated as they were by a perfectly defined anticipation of yet deeper woe, he refrained from exerting his power for his own deliverance, and even from rushing into the arms of his enemies; he quietly awaited his appointed hour.

At length, however, that hour arrived. Let us then follow him to the garden of Gethsemane, and mark his agony and bloody sweat, when he poured forth his soul, with “strong crying and tears,” unto God; let us listen to

his prayer, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" and again, "If this cup may not pass from me except I drink it, thy will be done;"* let us view him with our mind's eye, betrayed by his familiar friend, a prey to his malicious foes, bending under the weight of his cross, borne along by the multitude to Calvary, nailed to the fatal tree: let us observe the veil of darkness which overspread the face of nature, and hear his piercing cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" let us call to mind, that in that hour of unutterable desertion, he was bearing upon himself the inconceivable burden of the sins of men. Thus only shall we appreciate with any degree of exactness, the sufferings of the Lamb of God. Well might the rocks be torn asunder, and the veil of the temple be rent from top to bottom; well might the bodies of the saints, which slept, awake from death's slumber, at the moment which closed these solemn hours of darkness and woe—when he

* Matt. xxvi. 39, 42.

said, “It is finished,” and “bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.”*

5. The contrast which we have now been considering, affords us a *measure*, by which we may estimate the greatness of redeeming mercy. Let our thoughts *ascend* to the original majesty and blessedness of Christ; let them go down to the opposite extreme of his humiliation and suffering;† let us connect and compare the two states; let us add the unfathomable depth to the glorious elevation—

* John xix. 30.

† “There are in all the sufferings of the Son of God, and particularly in his inward tribulations, peculiarities and excellencies that no other sufferings can or should pretend to. The dignity of the person that suffered did stamp an infinite value on them; and the vastness, or rather immensity of his love to God, and charity to man in suffering, gave such degrees of sensibility to his sufferings, that nothing can reach or fathom, but a love as boundless as his own. And the more that any measures of this love take possession of the heart, so proportionably the more just and clear will one’s apprehensions of the sufferings of the Lamb of God be.” —*Just Measures of the Pious Institutions of Youth*, by George Munro, vicar of Letterkenny, Ireland vol. ii. p. 295.

and we shall not be left without some just apprehensions of that amazing love, which brought Emmanuel from his throne, to live and die for sinners.

Now, in the effects produced by this dispensation of mercy on all who accept it in faith, we shall find another contrast of a similar character, but in the reverse order, which may serve to prove, that as his love towards us is infinite, so our gratitude towards him *ought* to know no bounds. What are the evils from which Christians are delivered by their incarnate Lord? The power of darkness; the tyranny of Satan; the disease of sin; the curse of the law; the worm that dieth not; the fire which never shall be quenched; a life of iniquity and wretchedness; an eternity of woe. On the other hand, what are the gifts which he graciously confers upon them? The light of divine truth; the pardon of all their sins; the abounding influences of the Holy Spirit; “the peace of God which passeth all understanding;” and to crown all, an immortality of joy. “Ye are not come to the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire; nor unto black-

ness, and darkness, and tempest, but ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”*

If such are the dangers and woes from which we are saved, and such the blessings with which we are invested, through the incarnation and sufferings of the Son of God, how can we hesitate to surrender *all* our faculties to the service of our Redeemer? “The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”†

6. It is a remarkable instance of the enigmatical character of prophecy, that, in imme-

* Heb. xii. 18. 22—24.

† 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

diat connexion with his prediction of the propitiatory *death* of the Messiah, Isaiah speaks of *his prolonging his days*.—"When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand."* But the prophecy has been fully explained by the event; and now the atoning sacrifice and *resurrection* of Christ are coupled in the view of every Christian, never again to be severed.

The resurrection of our Lord is our proper evidence that his death was not in vain—that his victory over the "last enemy" of man, and over sin, hell, and Satan, is already won; and that now all who believe in him, as the sacrifice of their sins, may also rely upon him as their living, unchanging, Saviour; "for, if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."†

Here, indeed, we open another ample page in the history of the love of Christ. Jesus having paid, on the cross, the appointed price for the souls of his people, and having again

* Isa. liii. 10

† Rom. v. 10.

set down at the right-hand of his Majesty on high, is described as taking possession of his church, as a bridegroom of his bride; and henceforth, with an ardour and strength beyond all human conception, he loves her as HIS OWN. *Submissive* love on her part, and *protecting* love on *his*, distinguish their blessed relationship. Having imputed to her his own righteousness, and sanctified her by his Spirit, he can now address her in the endearing language: “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee, . . . thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse.”* Well may the church reply: “Set me as a seal upon thy heart; as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for *love*, it would utterly be contemned!”†

7. “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated

* Cant. iv. 7. 9.
Gurney.

† Cant. viii. 6, 7.

his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, *even as the Lord the church*; for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”* It is evident that Paul is here dwelling on his favourite figure, of the *head* and the *body*; with the obvious understanding, first, that the head is an actual part of the body; and, secondly, that it is its most important part—the source of life and sensation, and the seat of the mind. “Christ,” he tells us, “is the head of the body, the church.”† Christians must “grow up into *him*, in all things, which is the *head*, from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.”‡ The figure, like other figures in Scripture, is simple and familiar; yet it affords an exact illustration of the *love* of the risen and glorified Saviour towards his church universal.

The head is *one* with the body: “by joints and bands it is knit”§ to its members, just as they are knit to each other. So Christ is one with the church—himself forming an actual

* Eph. v. 28. 30.

† Col. i. 18.

‡ Eph. v. 15, 16.

§ Col. ii. 19.

part of that mystical body. Not only does he abide with his disciples in the character of an omnipresent Saviour, cherishing them by his grace, and protecting them by his power; but he brings them individually into connexion and union with himself; he dwells *in* them, and they dwell *in* him.* Nor is their fellowship with the Son alone; *through him* it is with the Father also: “That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in them, that they also may be *one in us* . . . that they may be *one, even as we are one*; I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.”† Who can doubt that the union thus maintained with his church, by her Lord and Redeemer, is in unutterable *love*? “Who shall separate us from the *love of Christ*? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” . . . “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”‡

From the head sensation is diffused over the whole body; and the instant that any one of our members is severed from this source of

* John vi. 56. 1 John iii. 24.

† John xvii. 21—23.

‡ Rom. viii. 35. 37.

life and feeling, it becomes insensible and dies. Thus the Christian derives all his spiritual life from his union with Christ; and except we “hold the head”* by faith, there can be no life in us—we are still “*dead* in trespasses and sin.”† Nor will a mere intellectual belief in Jesus as our Saviour serve this all-important purpose, any more than a juxtaposition would give life to a limb which belongs not to the body. There must be that heart-felt reliance on Christ, which animates the affections, and works by love. Then will our holy Head be a perpetual source to us of vital energy. We shall be alive unto God and holiness in this present world; and, being joined by indissoluble bonds, to the Prince of immortality, we shall live *with him* forever.

The next point to union and life is *fellow feeling*. So long as they maintain a healthy connexion with the head, all the members of the body are tenderly alive to each other’s feelings. But the centre of this sympathy is in the head itself; and not the smallest muscle, vessel, or nerve, in any one of our limbs, is in any

* Col. ii. 19.

† Eph. ii. 1.

degree affected but the sensorium *there*, responds and vibrates to the affection. Thus Christians, while they individually derive their life from Christ, their Head, suffer and rejoice in sympathy with each other. But Christ himself is the very source of these mutual feelings, and his own sympathy towards us is infinitely more acute, tender, and effective than that of our nearest Christian brethren. Having himself experienced unutterable woe, and passed through the ordeal of manifold temptation, he is always alive to the sorrows and dangers of his people. “In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”* “We have not an high-priest which cannot be *touched with the feeling of our infirmities*; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”†

Nor is the sympathy of our divine Redeemer with his church, restricted to her sorrows and temptations; he can also rejoice in her joy: “Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem The

* Heb. ii. 18.

† Heb. iv. 15.

Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty ; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy ; he will rest in his love ; he will joy over thee with singing.”* In hours of comparative peace and tranquillity, when Christians are permitted to commune with their Lord, and to delight themselves in his presence, the language of the Bridegroom is intelligibly heard : “ Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone ; the flowers appear on the earth ; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land ; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs ; and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.”†

We cannot look upon a person engaged in business or conversation, and watch his eye and listen to his words, without perceiving that the head represents the body—sees, hears, thinks, and speaks for the whole man. So Christ undertakes and provides for his people ; acts on their behalf ; and represents them in the courts of heaven. In the character of a

* Zeph. iii. 14. 17.

† Cant. ii. 10—13.

faithful and ever-loving advocate, he appears in the presence of God for us; defends our interests, and pleads our cause. Our enemy and accuser fails to triumph over us, only because our almighty friend continually rebukes him. Our prayers are accepted, only because, when they ascend into the presence of God the Father, it is our High-Priest who presents them—enveloping them in the sweet incense of his own intercession. “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right-hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us.”* “But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”†

Lastly, the head *rules* the body. *There* dwells the immaterial mind, with all its powers of reason; *there* the will is determined; and, in obedience to the will, the various members of the body move and act; nor can they, when in a healthy state, possibly do otherwise.

* Rom. viii. 34.

† Heb. vii. 24, 25.

So Christ is the ever-present sovereign and all-wise ruler of his church ; his is the master-mind which pervades and regulates the whole body. By the influence of his Spirit, he guides the movements of all his living members ; he conducts them into truth, holiness, and peace ; he instructs them by his “anointing” which cannot lie ; his will is made manifest to them, not only in the page of Scripture, but in the secret of the heart ; and nothing is required on their parts, for the purposes either of safety or duty, but the *obedience of faith*. If their souls are sound in the truth, they *cannot* disobey him.

But the authority of the *mind* is not confined to the body over which it presides ; it exercises a kind of dominion over all other things for the body’s sake ; it claims surrounding nature as its property, and applies it to the benefit of man. So the Lord Jesus rules supreme, not only over the church, but over the universe, for the church’s sake. He applies to her welfare, present and eternal, resources of infinite depth and fertility, which are all his own. “God hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over

ALL THINGS to the church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”*

8. The fitness of the risen and glorified Saviour to all the need of his believing children, arises, in a peculiar manner, from the mysterious union in him, of the divine and human natures. With the supremacy and omniscience of Deity, he unites all the tenderness of brotherhood ; and again, while he is *man* to feel for the temptations of his people, he is *God* to deliver them from all their enemies. The same union will be conspicuously displayed in an awful day to come—when in the form and character of the “Son of Man,” yet with all the majesty of the eternal Godhead, he will come again, to complete the salvation and glory of his followers.

True, indeed, it is, that at the solemn hour which terminates their present life, Jesus visits his people individually—“precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”† In the “valley of the shadow of death” he is their friend and companion ; and when they tread the verge of Jordan, they find him like the high-priest of old, who bore the ark of the

* Eph. i. 22, 23.

† Ps. cxvi. 15.

covenant, standing in the midst of the river, that they may pass through its waves, with safety, to the land of promise. Thus may the humble Christian say with David, "I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness;"* or with Stephen, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;"† or with Paul, "To depart and be *with Christ* . . . is far better."‡

"The heir of heaven, henceforth I fear not death;
 In Christ I live; in Christ I draw the breath
 Of the true life;—Let, then, earth, sea, and sky
 Make war against me! On my heart I show
 Their mighty Master's seal. In vain they try
 To end my life, that can but end its woe.
 Is that a death-bed where a Christian lies?
 Yes! but not his—'tis Death himself there dies."

COLERIDGE.

Yet the church is taught to look forward, with hope and confidence, to that still more solemn period, when Jesus "shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,"—when "he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."§ This period, according to the record of Scrip-

* Ps. xvii. 15.

† Acts vii. 56.

‡ Phil. i. 23.

§ 2 Thess. i. 7. 10.

ture, will be distinguished by three events of unspeakable importance—the resurrection of the dead; the destruction, or purification by fire, of the visible world; and the final judgment of all men. Then shall “the wicked be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God;”* but “the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”† Raised in his likeness, or transformed into it, and invested with robes washed white in his blood, the Lord’s children, of every age, name, and nation, shall then behold in their Judge, a Saviour and a Friend. In the view of an assembled universe, he will present them to Himself‡—he will present them to his Father§—a *faultless* church; and in his perfect LOVE they will find their eternity of joy.

It appears, then, that the redeeming love of God—the Son—is manifested, *first*, by his voluntary self-reduction from original glory and bliss, to the lowliness of human nature, and to the sufferings of the cross, that he might atone for the sins of mankind; *secondly*,

* Ps. ix. 17.

† Matt. xiii. 43.

‡ Eph. v. 27.

§ Jude 24.

by his grace towards his people, in bringing them into union with himself, in feeding them with the bread of life, in sympathizing with their sorrows and joys, in pleading their cause, in governing them by his Spirit, and in ruling the universe itself for their benefit; and, *lastly*, by his bestowing upon them the victory over death, and by his consummating all their bliss, in eternal glory.

In the contemplation of these things, the heart of the Christian, though still prone to coldness and insensibility, can often melt into tenderness, and overflow with love and gratitude. But it is not only because of his beneficence towards ourselves, that we are taught to love the Son of God, but because of his intrinsic amiability—because of the beauty and divine perfection of his character. In humbling himself from his glorious estate, even to the death of the cross, he was one with the Father, not only in the scheme of mercy, but also in upholding the righteousness of the law; during his life on earth, he displayed, in his conduct as a man, a perfect conformity to the moral attributes of God; and now that he reigns supreme at the right-hand of the Majesty on high

no man can live in sin and yet claim him as a Saviour ; his kingdom is one of purity as well as peace.

We therefore acknowledge him to be a *righteous* Redeemer, “ the Holy One of Israel ; ” we depend on his *merits*, as well as on his mercies ; we admire and adore him for his boundless love, and for his eternal *worthiness*. “ *Worthy* is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” — “ Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.”*

* Rev. v. 12, 13.

SECTION V.

ON THE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD, IN REDEMPTION.—THE SPIRIT.

WHEN the Lord Jesus was on the point of quitting the sphere of his humiliation, and of returning to the glory of his Father, he gave his last commission to his disciples—"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the *Holy Ghost*."* Hence we cannot fail to learn, that the Holy Ghost is no mere influence or quality, but an equal object, with the Father and the Son, of the Christian's faith and allegiance. As such, he is frequently alluded to in the New Testament. The source of all true virtue and happiness among men, he claims our perpetual reverence; and to

* Matt. xxvii. 19.

blaspheme against him, is declared to be an unpardonable transgression. “All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme; but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.”*

The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Christ.†—He is *sent* of the Father,‡ and *sent* of the Son.§ Yet it cannot be denied that the authority and dignity which are thus ascribed to him, belong to the Supreme Being himself; and equally clear is it, that God alone can perform the *works* of the Spirit.

To search, illuminate, and cleanse the soul; to breathe into it the breath of the true life; to inspire the Lord’s servants; to distribute, according to his own will, those manifold gifts by which the church is edified—are the peculiar offices of the Spirit: and who shall deny that they are offices of *deity*? “God is a Spirit;” invisible and spiritual in his nature, he fills his own works; he exercises over them

* Mark iii. 28, 29.

† Rom. viii. 9.

‡ John xiv. 26.

§ John xv. 26.

an unseen and powerful influence ; he dwells and operates in the hearts of men. Nor can we deny the truth of the converse of the proposition—that the Spirit who fills the works of the Creator, who exercises over them an unseen and powerful influence, who dwells and operates in the hearts of men, is *God*. “The LORD is that SPIRIT.”*

Since, then, the Spirit is God, it plainly follows that he is also *love* ; for “ God is love ; ” and nothing can be more inseparable from the nature of the Deity, than this pervading attribute. When Paul beseeches his brethren to strive with him in prayer, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for (the sake of) the love of the Spirit, we may best understand him as speaking, not of our love to the Spirit, but of the *Spirit’s love to us*.†

It was through the agency of the Holy Ghost that the Son of God became incarnate, and was afterwards anointed for all his gracious offices. Immeasurably gifted for his work

* 2 Cor. iii. 17. See *Essays on Christianity*, 3d edition, vii. p. 143.

† Rom. xv. 30. Διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Πνεύματος.

and station, by the influences of the Spirit, Jesus became both the prophet and the king of his people. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,” says the Messiah, “because the LORD hath *anointed* me to preach good tidings unto the meek.”* Again, the psalmist, worshipping him, says—“Thy *throne*, O God, is forever and ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre; thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness; therefore God, thy God, hath *anointed* thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”† Jesus was also the Christ, i. e. the Anointed one, in his *priestly* character. The precious ointment which was poured forth upon the head of Aaron, and ran down to the skirts of his garment, was probably a type of that unlimited effusion of the Holy Ghost, through which the Saviour offered on the cross, one all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of mankind. “Through the ETERNAL SPIRIT,” he “offered HIMSELF, without spot, to God.”‡

The boundless communications made to the

* Isa. lxi. 1; *comp.* ch. xi. 2, and John iii. 34.

† Ps. xiv. 6, 7; *comp.* ii. 2.

‡ Heb. ix. 14.

Lord Jesus of a spiritual influence, are to be regarded, not merely as divine gifts bestowed on his human nature, but as a necessary result of that perfect *oneness* of design and operation, which subsists in the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, for the redemption of the world. Very distinct were the tokens given of this joint purpose and action, on that memorable occasion, when the heavens were opened upon Jesus, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and lighted upon him, while the voice of the Father was heard, saying, “ ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ ”* Who then can doubt that Heaven’s vast design for man’s salvation, is to be ascribed to the love of the Spirit, as well as to that of the Father and the Son?

But let us mark the gracious dealings of the Holy Ghost, in applying this scheme of mercy to our own benefit. The Spirit who *co-operated* with Christ in his sacrifice on the cross, is, through that sacrifice, *himself* bestowed on mankind, to enlighten, teach, regenerate, purify, console, and ripen for heaven.

* Matt. iii. 16, 17.

May we not rest assured that he performs all these offices, in the most ardent, tender, and persevering love ?

1. No one will deny, that there went forth a command of benevolence as well as power, when God said, “ Let there be light :” for without light, in the natural world, all would be confusion and danger to his living and sensitive creatures. Now the state of man in the fall, with respect to a right knowledge of God and of his law, is like that of the world in the obscurity of chaos. Not only is he dead in trespasses and sins ; but he is “ under the power of darkness ;” * he is sitting “ in darkness and in the shadow of death :” † and from this melancholy condition he can be delivered only through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Since this is the clear doctrine of Scripture, it appears to follow, that whatsoever can be found among our species, in any age or country, of *true* moral and spiritual light—be it fainter or brighter—must be ascribed, not to the natural reason of man, but, directly or indirectly, to that divine Spirit. This remark is not without its just application, as I conceive

* Col. i. 13.

† Luke i. 79.

to some ancient writers who had not the Scriptures ; for we can scarcely deny that rays of heavenly light shot across the darkness of their speculations. But where would have been the preaching of Noah, of Abraham, and of Job ; where the precepts of Moses ; where the fervent admonitions and luminous discoveries, of the prophets ; where the brightness of that " burning and shining light," who preceded the coming of Jesus, had it not been for the *revealing* influence of the Holy Ghost ? With still greater force may the same inquiry be made with respect to the apostles and evangelists. When they declared on the house-tops the truths which their Lord had taught them in secret places, it was " the Comforter" who brought all things to their remembrance, " whatsoever he had said unto them." * Like their predecessors, in the appointed course of divine revelation, they spake and " they wrote as they were moved of the Holy Ghost."

Do we ask for a distinct and palpable evidence of the love of the Spirit ? We may surely find such an evidence in the gift of the Holy

* John xiv. 26.

Scriptures, so graciously bestowed on us, through his inspiring power—a gift of rare worth and richness, which embraces, in its scope and intention, the *whole family of man*.

2. We are to conceive of the Holy Spirit, however, not merely as the agent of divine revelation, but as a wise and benevolent *preceptor*, who gradually unfolds his lessons to our understanding, *as we are able to bear them*; and at the same time impresses them upon our hearts. “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall *guide* you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.”* That gracious Spirit who gave the Scriptures forth, is the one *needful* interpreter of the sacred page; and as far as relates to all that affects the work of salvation he is ever ready to explain its meaning to the child-like and devotional inquirer.

But the teaching of the Spirit belongs to a *system* of training and government. He undertakes the whole conduct of our souls; and

* John xvi. 13, 14.

the very condition on which he instructs us in the doctrines of truth, is obedience to the law of God. Although, for a time, these doctrines may be obscure to us, the *precepts* of religion are always clear : and it is only as we humbly endeavour to add virtue to our faith, that the Spirit will enable us to add *knowledge* to our virtue. Again, when we have made some little proficiency in the school of Christ, the Spirit teaches us to apply our knowledge to its practical uses. He points out, with clearness to our souls, our peculiar lines of duty ; he prompts and directs our respective services in the church ; he opens our path before us, and shows us how to walk in it. We need not that any man teach us, because “ the *anointing* ” teaches us “ of all things, and is truth and no lie.”*

Nor does our Divine Teacher withhold from the objects of his care a gentle yet wholesome discipline. When we please him by our teachableness and obedience, he rewards us with his smiles ; but he is *grieved* by our indolence and rebellion ; and then, by withdrawing from us his sacred presence, and leaving us

* 1 John ii. 27.

for a time in darkness and distress, he kindly instructs us to cleave to him, for the future, with greater constancy. When such is our sorrowful state we may well adopt the prayer of the poet :

“ Return, O holy Dove, return !
 Sweet messenger of rest ;
 I hate the sins that made thee mourn,
 And drove thee from my breast ;
 The dearest idol I have known,
 Whate’er that idol be,
 Help me to tear it from thy throne,
 And worship only thee.”

COWPER.

The strength and constancy of the Spirit’s love is indeed made manifest by his long striving, not only with the living though halting members of his church, but even with a thoughtless and degenerate world. Truly may it be said, that our inward Monitor fulfils the office of charity itself—that he “ *suffereth long and is kind.*”

3. “ That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit . . . the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst

not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”*

The act of omnipotence by which the Spirit—in conformity with the will of the Father—first imparts to us a new and heavenly life, must surely be ascribed to unmerited *love* ; and the same blessed attribute is manifested in every step of that process, by which he gradually restores the lost soul of man to the image of his Maker. The whole is a work of grace, that is, of *unmerited favour*, and therefore of *love*. To convince of sin, to humble the soul under a sense of it, to inspire a living faith in Jesus, to change the whole course of the affections, and finally, to cleanse the heart, and to deliver from all defilement, are offices of divine compassion, which the Spirit is ever willing to perform for all who seek the Lord. And who can deny that they demand the warmest gratitude of every Christian, towards that holy and benevolent Agent?

When we have exchanged the love of the world for the love of God, and have expe-

* John iii. 6, 8.

rienced the happiness of this blessed change—when, “instead of the thorn” has sprung up the “fir tree,” and “instead of the brier,” the “myrtle tree,”—we cannot refrain from declaring the praises of Him who is the immediate Author, in the economy of grace, of this *new creation*.

4. But the victory over sin is far from being accomplished in a moment. Long is the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit; and “lively and strong” are the enemies against whom it is our lot to contend. There are our many evil propensities, which, though weakened and brought under a yoke, are not yet destroyed; and there are, above all, “the rulers of the darkness of this world,” ever ready to deceive and destroy. Nor are we to forget, that in the good order of Providence, the Christian is often exposed to difficulty and distress—to the fiery trial both of his faith and patience. Where, then, is our refuge from day to day, but in the strengthening influences of the Holy Ghost? Weak and helpless in ourselves, we can fight the good fight of faith, only as we are clothed in the “armour of God,” and are strengthened “with might by

his Spirit in the inner man.”* Nor is this necessary aid withheld from those who pray for it—“God is able,” said the apostle, “to make all grace abound toward you, that ye always having all sufficiency, in all things, may abound to every good work.”†

Now, in communicating this strengthening influence to the soul of man, the Holy Spirit displays not only beneficence, but *sympathy*; for *he* too pities our weakness, and breathes unutterable prayers on behalf of his people. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, (performs our part in prayer,) with *groanings which cannot be uttered*.”‡ Who, then, can doubt the love of the Spirit?

5. Finally, the Spirit is our *Comforter*. “If ye love me, keep my commandments; and I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him

* Eph. iii. 16. † 2 Cor. ix. 8; *comp.* Col. i. 11.

‡ Rom. viii. 26.

not, neither knoweth him ; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”* “It is expedient for you that I go away ; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”†

The title which is here rendered Comforter—in the Greek *Paraclete*—is one of a very comprehensive import. In its common use, it denotes the individual who adopts us as his clients, and who is ever ready to defend our cause, to protect our property and persons, to relieve our sorrows, and to supply our wants. As applied to the Holy Spirit, it may, perhaps, be illustrated by one of the figures of the Old Testament : “As birds flying, so will the Lord of Hosts defend Jerusalem ; defending also, he will deliver it, and passing (or as in the Hebrew, *hovering*) over, he will preserve it.”‡

While that holy Dove spreads his wings and hovers over the Lord’s children, there descends upon them from above, a divine, preserving influence. If they transgress the limits of this influence, they are instantly ex-

* John xiv. 15—17. † John xvi. 7. ‡ Isa. xxxi. 5

posed both to sin and Satan ; but so long as they steadfastly abide under it, in all things, they are quiet in the centre of storms, and safe in the heat of danger.

But the influence of the Comforter not only preserves, but *gladdens*. It elevates every pure pleasure; and sweetens every bitter cup. Although the world may frown upon the Christian, and sorrow and suffering be his portion, he is taught of the Spirit to *rejoice* in the Lord. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God ; and if children, then heirs ; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”* This is the *sealing* of the “Holy Spirit of promise.”† In seasons of peculiar favour, does the heavenly Visitant impress upon the hearts of the Lord’s children the seal of bliss ; he fills them with “all joy and peace in believing ;” and the happiness with which he inspires them, is the “earnest” of their inheritance—the sure foretaste of their future joys.

Such is the true explanation of the same apostle’s doctrine, that “our hope maketh not

* Rom. viii. 16, 17.

† Eph. i. 13, &c.

ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”* The hope which maketh ashamed, is that which fails to be realized, and which ends only in disappointment. “My brethren,” says Job, “have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away; which are brackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid. What time they wax warm, they vanish; when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place; the troops of Tema looked, the companies of Sheba waited for them; *they were confounded because they had hoped; they came thither and were ashamed.*”† Not such is the hope of the humble, watchful, and *persevering* follower of the Lord Jesus Christ; for *grace* bestowed upon him here, is both the evidence and the pledge of his approaching glory. When he enters upon an unseen world, he will joyfully discover, that the grace of the Spirit has been flowing towards him, from no shallow or evanescent fountain; but is there poured forth, in a boundless stream, for the gladdening of the glorified church, forever.

* Rom. v. 5.

† Job vi. 15—20.

Thus, it appears, that in the anointing of Jesus as the Messiah; and in his enlightening, teaching, regenerating, sanctifying, and consoling influences in ourselves, we are furnished with a series of distinct evidences of the Spirit's love for our fallen race; and more especially for the church of Christ. But as with the Father and the Son, so it is with the Spirit: We are invited and *constrained* to love him, not merely because of his beneficence towards ourselves, but because of his intrinsic and infinite worthiness, as an object of our affections. Benevolent he truly is, in the most exalted degree; but his benevolence is the accompaniment of his holiness. *Purity* is the very substance of his character; and *love* distinguishes the whole gracious work, through which that purity is conveyed to man.

On a deliberate view of that glorious scheme of mercy, which we have now been endeavouring to unfold, our hearts may well be filled with admiration and astonishment, while they are humbled in the dust, and

melted into love. What do we not owe of affection, gratitude, and allegiance to the Father, who loved us from eternity, and sent his Son into the world to save us ; to the Son, who bore the bitter penalty of our sins on the cross, and who ever lives to make intercession for us ; and to the Spirit, who applies these mercies, and prepares us for heavenly joy ? Yet, while we contemplate these distinctive operations of divine mercy, as demanding corresponding exertions, on our own part, of faith, love, and obedience, we must never, for a moment, forget that God is ONE, and that his essence cannot be divided. His love does, indeed, flow forth for the redemption of mankind, in the respective offices of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit ; but it is the love of a single, infinite, and incomprehensible BEING, who is the author, the medium, and the end of all things.

When JEHOVAH had laid the foundations of the earth, and had called into being his creature *man*, his love was celebrated by the harmony of the spheres and the applause of angels—"the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."*

* Job xxxviii. 7.

“From harmony, from heavenly harmony,
This universal frame began;
From harmony to harmony,
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
The diapason closing full in *man*.”

DRYDEN.

When the same love was yet more gloriously displayed in the mission and incarnation of the Prince of Peace—when both the majesty and mercy of God were made manifest to mankind in the face of Jesus—the melody of heaven again became audible. “And suddenly there was with the shepherds a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will to man.”* Nor can it be doubted, that as this blessed dispensation extends its influence over the world, songs of praise will be more and more heard, from “the uttermost parts of the earth”—“even glory to the righteous.”†

“One song employs all nations, and all cry,
Worthy the Lamb, for he was slain for us ;

* Luke ii. 13, 14.

† Isa. xxiv. 16.

The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks
Shout to each other, and the mountain tops
From distant mountains catch the flying joy ;
Till, nation after nation taught the strain,
Earth rolls the rapturous Hosannah round.”

COWPER.

Finally, when time shall be no longer—when the whole mediatorial scheme shall have been accomplished, and the elect of God gathered into heavenly places—one harmonious anthem will forever ascend from that ransomed and glorified assembly which no man can number. In perfect accordance with cherubim and seraphim, will they sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb—“ Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty ; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints ;” and again, “ Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth !”*

May we reflect, with humble reverence and holy joy, on the *creating*, *renovating*, and *crowning* mercies of our God ; may a sense of those mercies be in us an ever-flowing well-spring of love and gratitude ; may we bear our

* Rev. xv 3, 4 ; xix. 6.

part, individually, in the universal melody of thanksgiving; and under an unutterable feeling of our obligations to God, may we surrender our whole hearts to his Spirit—our whole lives to his service !

One additional remark will bring the present branch of our subject to its conclusion. We have hitherto been considering the *contemplation* of God, only as a means of increasing that *love to him*, which is the *main* qualification for the joys and services of heaven ; but, independently of this consideration, it has *in itself* a heaven-ward tendency. The *habit* of fixing our minds on God, as the subject of our thoughts and meditations, is one of which, in heaven, we shall find the full value. May we not believe that it is an endless source of occupation and delight to the inhabitants of that blessed place, to contemplate the perfections of the Deity—to inquire into the riches of his wisdom, love, and power—to admire the distinctive glories and perfect *oneness*, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ?

Let us, then, in dependence on the grace of God, accustom ourselves, even here, to this

divine employment. Amidst our many calls to active duty, let us still give due place to the *contemplative* part of the religious life. Let us frequently endeavour to lift up our souls above this present busy sphere, and to meditate on the glory of Jehovah. Thus shall we be the better prepared, not only to love God perfectly, in that world of which love is the element; but to unite with saints and angels in the highest of all applications of the mental faculty. “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now we know in part, but then shall we know, even as we are known.”

SECTION VI.

ON COMMUNION WITH GOD.

A MAN who has committed some grievous offence against his neighbour, and has neither repented of his fault nor been forgiven, has no inclination for the society of the offended party; especially if the latter is a person in authority, and has power to inflict punishment; on the contrary, he will rather flee from him; and will even adopt the most ingenious devices to avoid his presence. Just on the same grounds, but in a far greater degree, is fallen man *alienated* from God. While Adam continues in his uprightness, his highest happiness is to converse with his Maker; but no sooner does he fall into sin, than the whole train of his feelings is altered—he *hides* himself “from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the gar-

den.”* The prodigal must repent of his iniquities, must confess them, and pray to be forgiven; must be reconciled to the benevolent parent whom he has offended, before he can eat his bread, and commune with him in love.

While, indeed, a man is built up, like the Pharisees of old, in self-righteousness, he may imagine himself to be both able and fit to commune with the Moral Governor of the universe; but gross indeed is his delusion. Were the secrets of his heart made manifest to him, was he sensible of the utter vileness of his corrupt nature, he would instantly recoil from the presence of his Judge. Repentance and reconciliation are steps which must be trodden by every man, before he can possibly enjoy an effective communion with the Author of all good. What a mercy is it, then, that God has “laid help on one that is mighty”—that he has raised Jesus from the dead—that he has “exalted” him “to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give *repentance* to Israel, and *forgiveness of sins*.”†

No sooner have we been brought to repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord

* Gen. iii. 8.

† Acts v. 31.

Jesus Christ, than the door of communion with our heavenly Father is opened to our souls. Unworthy as we are to hold converse in spirit with an infinitely holy Being, Christ has “consecrated for us a new and living way”* to the throne of grace. Justified by faith in him, clothed in his righteousness, and depending on his perpetual intercession, we may now draw near to God with filial love and confidence, and call him “Abba, Father.”† Yet we cannot perform this sacred duty in our own strength; we must seek the influence of that Holy Spirit, who can alone impart a living energy to our praises and our prayers. Through Christ we all “have access, *by one Spirit* unto the Father.”‡

Communion with God, like the contemplation of that glorious Being, is *an act of the soul*, which originates in love, and has an un-failing tendency to brighten and confirm the affection from which it springs. On the other hand, if we neglect to avail ourselves of this blessed privilege—a privilege for which the mediation of Christ, and the aid of the Spirit,

* Heb. x. 20.

† Rom. viii. 15

‡ Eph. ii. 18.

are so freely offered to us—our love to him, with whom we *ought* to commune, will subside into coolness. The subject may be illustrated by some of the most familiar realities of common life.

The chain of friendship—to adopt the simple metaphor of the North American Indians—is kept bright by the converse of friends. If we truly love our friend, and are on good terms with him, we naturally seek his society; and the more we enjoy of it—mind communing with mind—the more does our love for him abound. If, on the other hand, we fail to attend to the impulse of affection, and neglect our converse with him, the affection itself will soon be found to wither.

When a cessation of intercourse between friends is occasioned by circumstances over which they have no control, there does indeed arise a certain effort of the mind which counteracts the effect of absence, and overleaps the greatest distance. But it is an undeviating rule that when such cessation is voluntary, the affection which attracts them to each other becomes weaker and weaker—*especially in the mind of the party who is the most guilty of*

neglect. If, for example, a son prefers the pleasures of the world to the society of his parents, and gradually deserts his home, until it becomes a strange place to him : although the yearnings of parental love may never cease to follow him, his own feelings of filial regard will be sure to decay ; and unless reawakened by some peculiarly touching circumstance, or by a divine power, will end in total indifference, or perhaps dislike. How important then that the Christian should be watchful and diligent in *maintaining* his communion with God !

It is a fact which ought deeply to humble us, that although the blessing of such a communion is freely provided for us in the gospel of our Redeemer, the lingering corruptions of nature often interfere with our desire, and even with our willingness, fully to enjoy it. In the wandering away of our minds from the Father of mercies, even at times which we profess to devote to worship, and in our frequent disinclination to approach the throne of grace, what evidences do we find of the deceitfulness of our own hearts ? But to yield to the weakness which withdraws us from God—voluntarily to forsake our communion with him—is awfully

dangerous, and may be fatal. In such a case, we alone are the party guilty of neglect; and, therefore, whatsoever may still be his compassion towards us, our love to him—that pure affection without which we cannot be qualified for the enjoyment of heaven—will certainly grow cool; and if the neglect is continued, must perish.

1. Although true religion abounds in social feelings and duties, there is in its work on the individual soul, a depth of solitude with which none can interfere. Every heart knows its own bitterness; every man must bear his own burden; and when we come at last to the valley of the shadow of death, we must pass through its darkness without any human companionship—*alone* with our God. Hence we may perceive the importance of that solitary devotion, in which the Christian, separated for a season from his fellow-men, can say with the Psalmist: “Whom have I in heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth that I *desire besides thee*.”* Our Lord’s precept on the subject is clear and decisive:

* Ps. lxxiii. 25.

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”*

Jesus Christ himself, virtually exemplified this precept, when, in the wilderness, or on the mountain's side—far away from his disciples—he poured forth his soul in prayer, and held solemn converse with God his Father; and it is surely the duty of every Christian to obey his word, and follow his example. To retire occasionally during the day, and especially at the beginning and end of it, from all human society, for the purpose of self-examination and prayer, is a practice which Christianity may be said to enjoin, and which affords an important aid to every other duty. Such times of solitary religious exercise, are eminently useful for the deepening of our humility, and for the strengthening of our faith, our hope, and our virtue.—The more diligent we are in private communion with God, the more conspicuously shall we bear the mark of his

* Matt. vi. 6.

Spirit upon us, in our whole demeanour and conversation among men.*

2. Many are the significant hints given to us in Scripture, on the subject of *family religion*. The Lord knew that Abraham would “command his children and his *household* after him” to “keep the way of the Lord.”† Joshua said, “As for me and *my house*, we will serve the Lord.”‡ The Israelites were

* Devotion is retirement from the world which God has made, to *him alone*; it is to withdraw from the avocations of sense, to employ our attention wholly upon *him*, as upon an object actually present, to yield our selves up to the influence of the divine presence, and to give full scope to the affections of gratitude, love, reverence, trust, and dependence; of which infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, is the natural and only adequate object.—*Bishop Butler’s second sermon on the Love of God*, p. 247. Devotion is the work of the heart, it is transacted in the inner man; the principle of it is divine love, and its very nature is nothing else, but the different motions and appearances of this pure flame in the soul, either disposing it to an absolute surrender of itself to God, or humbling it under a deep sense of its own unworthiness, or exerting in it mighty and vehement desires, or, in fine, making it dissolve in praise and thanksgiving.—*Monro’s Pious Institution of Youth*, vol. i. p. 211.

† Gen. xviii. 19.

‡ Josh. xxiv. 15.

commanded to teach the Lord's precepts to their children, and to speak of them, as they sat in their houses; and the passover was celebrated among them separately, in every family? * David said, "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." † Cornelius "feared God with all his house." ‡ There was a *church* in the house of Nymphas; and another in that of Philemon: § their respective families, doubtless, being united in the fellowship of the gospel, and in the daily worship of God. There can, indeed, be no doubt, that nearness of natural connexion ought ever to be accompanied among Christians, by a corresponding intimacy in matters of religion. Husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, should be helpers of each other's faith and joy; and should account it a privilege of no trifling value, to frequent the throne of grace in each other's company. With respect to our children, more particularly, it is surely our duty, by watchful instruction, and sometimes by uniting with them in their private religious exercises, to train

* Deut. vi. 7. Exod. xii. 21. † Ps. ci. 2.

‡ Acts x. 2. § Col. iv. 15. Philem. 2.

them in the habit of daily prayer—just as we see the parent bird, by frequent example and experiment, teaching and inducing her young ones to use the wings which God has given them.

Nor ought we to neglect to extend a religious care over our servants. Our whole household should be solemnly united, day by day, in the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in drawing near, in spirit, to that gracious Being from whom we derive all our blessings both temporal and spiritual. Thus shall we experience the fulfilment of that word of promise: “The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defence; and there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day-time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”*

It is on occasions of this description, that Christians discover the advantage of *sympathy* in religion. Together they mourn over their transgressions, together they rejoice in the good-

* Isa. iv. 5, 6.

ness of the Lord ; as with the heart of one man, they pray for his grace and protection, and praise him for all his benefits. . Thus are they individually strengthened in their Christian course, while they maintain *the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*.

3. Similar effects are produced in a more diffusive manner, when Christians are engaged in *congregational worship* ; the sympathy which is then often excited, being more peculiarly one of *joy*. The church, indeed, like individual Christians, is liable to seasons of affliction and distress ; but the general complexion and *true spirit* of her public services, are such as the Psalmist has described : “ Serve the Lord with gladness, come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God ; it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves ; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgivings, and into his courts with praise ; be thankful to him and bless his name ; for the Lord is good ; his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endureth to all generations.”*

That it is our bounden duty, by the regular

* Ps. c. 2—5.

attendance of public worship, to confess our allegiance to the King of kings, admits of no question. We are commanded in Scripture not to “forsake the assembling of ourselves together;”* and in the zealous performance of this great duty, we have a sure guide in the example of Jesus Christ himself. How often do we read of his appearing in the synagogues on the Sabbath-days; and how important is the information given us by the evangelist, that this was his “*custom*.”† Blessed be his holy name, he still condescends to bestow his presence upon his disciples, when they are gathered together for the solemn purpose of worshipping the Father.‡ “He is for a crown of glory and for a diadem of beauty unto the residue of his people;”§ he brings them into “the banqueting house,” and his “banner” over them is “love.”|| Thus are they enabled to commune in spirit, one with another, and with him their common Lord; and while they reverently wait upon him, their strength is renewed for every good word and work.

Our *tastes*, as well as our actions, are to a

* Heb. x. 25. † Luke iv. 16; *comp.* Matt. xii. 9, &c.

‡ Matt. xviii. 20. § Isa. xxviii. 5. || Cant. ii. 4.

great extent under the sway of habit, and are, therefore, capable of being strengthened and improved in any particular direction. How desirable then is it, that in dependence on the grace of God, which can alone *turn* the heart of man, we should make the best use of this facility in our nature, and cultivate both in ourselves and others, a *taste* for devotion ! The Christian must be careful not to cast a gloom over religion. He is brought into the *sunshine* of truth ; and under its gladdening influence, he must himself learn, and he must endeavour to teach his children, to take *delight* in religious pursuits ; and, above all, in the worship of the Creator.

This end will be greatly promoted by regularity and constancy in the performance of our devotional duties ; for *taste* and *practice* are ever found to go hand in hand, and to act and react on each other. The more we take pleasure in any action, the more prone we are to perform it ; and again, the more diligent we are in the performance of it, the more necessary it becomes to our comfort and enjoyment.

For this, as well as other reasons, it may be regarded as a Christian duty, to set apart an

hour or two during the week, besides the Sabbath-day, for the solemn and happy purpose of public worship. The temporary exchange of our usual pursuits for this holy employment—while the world at large is engrossed in its own concerns—can scarcely fail to be profitable to our souls, and acceptable to our God and Saviour. But how precious to every one who is serious in the pursuit of heavenly things, is the Sabbath itself! What cause for thankfulness is it, that God has ordained the cessation of worldly labours on every recurring seventh day, that his children may enjoy a wholesome rest; and that in the quietness of this rest, they may devote their undivided faculties to communion with himself! The Sabbath is indeed an institution pre-eminently calculated to remind us of *divine benevolence*; and is, therefore, peculiarly *suited* by the heartfelt melody of thanksgiving and praise.

4. Those who are the most aware of the weakness of our nature, will be the least disposed to underrate the importance of the outward *framework* of religious duty. Although Christianity is not a religion of forms and ceremonies, it claims the assistance of many exter-

nal observances ; such, for example, as retirement from society for the purpose of private devotion, the appointment of stated times for waiting upon the Lord in our families, the orderly keeping of the Sabbath-day, and the regular attendance on our places of public worship. Yet all these things are useless, and may even be a means of the further hardening of our hearts, unless we maintain, in connexion with them, the *life* of true worship. “ God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” To frequent the house of prayer ; to bow the knee before him ; to draw near to him with the lip—*while our hearts are far from him*—can be regarded only as a mockery and offence. “ Bring no more vain oblations ; incense is an abomination unto me ; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with ; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth ; they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them.”*

Little will it serve the purposes of friend-

* Isa. i. 13, 14.

ship to seek the company of those whom we love if we forget them while in their presence, and refuse to give our *minds* to them. In such a case, there may be the appearance of brotherhood; but the flame of true love will presently subside. So it is in the infinitely higher concern of communion with God. Although it is assisted by outward observances, it is an act of the soul alone; and it is only as the *immortal and spiritual* part of man holds converse with its Creator and its Redeemer, that we can know any thing of true worship, or experience a corresponding increase of our love to God. “As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth *my soul* after thee, O God; my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God”* “*My soul*, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him.”†

Here, however, it ought to be again expressly noticed, that as the soul of man has no tendency to commune with God, until it is quickened of the Spirit; so, in order to maintain this communion, we are in perpetual need of the same life-giving power. In all our religious

* Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

† Ps. lxii. 5.

services—in all our approaches to God, whether private or public—we must abstain from any dependence on our own wisdom and strength, and cast ourselves in faith on the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit.

Now, although the outward offices of religion serve a highly important purpose in promoting its practical operation, we are not to forget, that, under divine influence, the soul is capable of communion with God when these offices are withdrawn. The Christian may retire into the solitude of his own heart, and hold communion with his Maker, even while he is in the midst of a multitude; nor will his worship of that Supreme Object of his regard and affections be confined to any stated periods set apart for the purpose. He is taught to realize the perpetual presence of his God; and on every passing occasion of life to lift up his heart to *him* as to a Father and a Friend. Certainly it ought to be the habit of our souls, as the hours of each day pass over us, frequently to bring our ignorance and weakness to the Fountain of light and strength—our poverty and emptiness to the *fulness which is in Christ*.

“Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpress’d;
The motion of a hidden fire,
That trembles in the breast.

“Prayer is the breathing of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye,
When none but God is near.”

MONTGOMERY.

It is chiefly through this hidden exercise of a devotional mind, that the Christian *walks with God*; and the more we are thus brought into contact with his goodness and power, the greater will be our delight in such a walk.*

* “En effet, mes frères,” says the eloquent Massillon, “la prière n’est pas un effort de l’esprit, un arrangement d’idées, une pénétration profonde des mystères et des conseils de Dieu ; c’est un simple mouvement du cœur, c’est un gémissement de l’âme vivement touchée à la vue de ses misères ; c’est un sentiment vif et secret de nos besoins et de notre foiblesse, et une humble confiance, qui l’expose à son Seigneur, pour en obtenir la délivrance et la remède. La prière ne suppose pas dans l’âme qui prie de grandes lumières, des connaissances rares, un esprit plus élevé et plus cultivé que

The proneness of the regenerate soul to ascend in living aspirations after him, will constantly

celui des autres hommes ; elle suppose seulement plus de foi, plus de componction, plus de desir d'être délivré de ses tentations et de ses misères." "In fact, my brethren, prayer is not an effort of the understanding, an arrangement of ideas, a profound inquiry into the mysteries and counsels of God ; it is a simple movement of the heart ; it is the groaning of a soul keenly affected in the view of its own wretchedness ; it is a lively and secret feeling of our wants and our weakness, and a humble confidence in exposing them to the Lord, in order to obtain deliverance and cure. Prayer does not imply, in the soul which prays, great talents, rare acquirements, an understanding more exalted and cultivated than that of other men ; it implies only more faith, more compunction, and a greater desire to be delivered from our temptations and our misery."—*Sermon sur la Prière.*

"Nay, one thing I know more ; that the prayer which is the most forcible, transcends and far exceeds all power of words. For St. Paul, speaking unto us of the most effectual kind of prayer, calls it sighs and groans that cannot be expressed. Nothing cries so loud in the ears of God as the sighing of a contrite earnest heart. It requires not the voice, but the mind ; not the stretching of the hands, but the intention of the heart ; not

increase ; and every act of secret communion with the Lord, will assist in confirming that *love* towards him from which it springs. Nor are these acts confined to prayer—often are they the movements of a spirit filled with praise. If it is our duty and privilege to “pray without ceasing,” it equally becomes us, in “every thing,” to “give thanks.”*

It appears, then, that in order to be fitted for communion with God, fallen man must first repent and be reconciled to his Creator—that the steadfast maintenance of that communion in the Christian believer, is a principal means, in the order of divine grace, for the increase and confirmation of his love—that he is therefore bound to exercise diligence in the devotional duties of the closet, of the family circle, and of the church—that the outward part of these duties is salutary and even needful, as an aid to

any outward shape or carriage of the body, but the inward behaviour of the understanding. How then can it slacken your worldly business and occasions, to mix them with the sighs and groans, which are the most effectual kind of prayer?”—*John Hales' Golden Remains.*

* 1 Thess. v. 17, 18.

inward worship; but that without *life*, it is useless, and may even be injurious—finally, that the secret intercourse of *the soul* with God, is the *vital breath* of the Christian, and ought to pervade the whole course of his conversation and experience.

Two additional remarks may be made in conclusion.

1. Communion is, in its nature, reciprocal. Not only are we to pour out our souls in prayer to the Lord; but we are to receive his mind, or counsel, in return. It is on this ground, as I conceive, that the reading of the Holy Scriptures forms an essential part of our private and family devotional duties; for in that sacred volume, God condescends to speak to us—to develope his mind for our instruction, guidance, and consolation. And, on the same principle, we recognise a connexion between public worship and the ministry of the gospel, which universally *professes* to be an expression of the mind of God. And such, undoubtedly, it ever will be, so long as it is scriptural in its character, and is offered under the influence and teaching of the Holy Spirit. But our heavenly Father is graciously pleased to communicate

his will to man, by a voice which speaks within, and which will ever direct us in the way of holiness. As long as his reconciled children obey that voice, and lead a life of righteousness, so long are they the children of light, and enjoy a free communion with Him in whom there is no darkness. But no sooner do they disobey their divine Monitor, and follow the devices of their own hearts, than their communion with God is interrupted. Even an angry feeling, or a polluting thought, will hinder the breathing of the soul towards the eternal Source of peace and purity. The spiritual man is gifted with a knowledge of “the *mind of Christ*,”* and just in the degree in which he is conformed to it, in his own disposition and conduct, is he capable of communing with God, in that pure love which sin alone can separate.

2. We have now been considering communion with God as an act of the soul, eminently calculated to increase our love for him; and, therefore, to prepare us for loving him eternally. But this communion with God—the Father, Son, and Spirit—like the contemplation

* 1 Cor. ii. 19.

of that glorious Being, is itself one blessed occupation—one boundless source of enjoyment and happiness—to the saints in glory. The frame and habit of it are suited to the very nature and character of heaven ; and will there be found a source of infinite and endless pleasure. There the soul, delivered from the shackles of mortality, draws near to its Creator, and converses with its Saviour, in the freedom of perfect purity ; there the assembled saints, unnumbered and innumerable, forever worship the Father in spirit and in truth ; and receive, in return, the full influences of that eternal mind which *wills* their holiness and joy.

SECTION VII.

ON SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD.

THE Christian is accustomed to trace *all things* in nature, in providence, and in grace, to the will of that infinite Being, in whom dwells the perfection of wisdom and holiness, and in those rules by which the world is governed, both naturally and morally, he recognises the fixed determinations of that will—the *laws* of an unchanging God.

1. In the order of *nature*, phenomena, or events, succeed each other on perfectly uniform principles; so that we soon learn from experience, and afterwards, from the constitution of our minds, cannot but feel assured, that certain causes, in the material world, are always followed by certain effects. Now that any given cause should, under the same circumstances, uniformly produce a particular effect, is an appointment of the divine will, which is usually

called a *law of nature*. We cannot doubt that many such laws are in action, which have not yet been detected by the scrutiny of man ; but others are either obvious to common observation, or have been brought to light by scientific inquiry.

For example, it has been fully proved that all particles of matter attract one another ; and that the force of that attraction (until they come into apparent contact) is in the inverse proportion of the squares of their distances. Philosophers have ascertained not only the existence, but, as far as the scope of their investigation extends, the ubiquity of this law ; which, indeed, appears to be God's chosen instrument for preserving the material universe in its present order. But of its origin it is utterly out of their power to give any account but one—God said, Let it be, and it was. Whatsoever, indeed, may be the triumphs of inductive philosophy, in classifying and generalizing the operations of nature, and in reducing the apparent number of the laws by which she is governed, our ultimate resort—the final rest for the inquisitiveness of man's mind—can be found only in the *fiat of omnipotence*.

Now, it is impossible for the Christian to doubt that the will of God, even in the government of the material world, is moved by a spring of infinite wisdom and benevolence; and that all the laws of nature are what they are, because it is *best* that they should be so—*best* for the ultimate happiness of his rational creatures, and *best* for his own glory.

2. Between the course of nature and that of *Providence*, there is an obvious, and, in this world, a necessary connexion. But the latter assumes a distinct character, when regarded as the order in which the Supreme Governor of the world deals with his rational creature, *man*. The laws by which these dealings are regulated, are by no means so clearly inscribed on the annals of man's history, in this lower world, as are the laws of nature on the face of the material universe. Yet we are not left without some perceptible indications that they are general and permanent; above all, that they are moral, exactly adapted to the holiness and benevolence of the Deity. These indications are amply confirmed in Scripture, which teaches us that God is *holy*—that he is also *love*—and that he deals with mankind, under every variety

of time, place, and circumstance, on principles of perfect righteousness, which can never change. If "clouds and darkness," are "round about him, justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne."

Experience affords sufficient evidence that the *main law* by which the course of divine Providence towards man is regulated, is that *virtue should produce happiness, and vice misery*. But this law is checked and modified by two provisions of vast practical importance. The first is, that man is here placed in a *state of trial*, involving many dangers and temptations, in order that his character may be put to the proof, and finally developed as a ground of judgment to come. The second is, that this state of trial is appointed to serve the purpose of *moral discipline*, that by an experimental process (often of a rough and mysterious nature) we may, under grace, be weaned from our iniquities, and trained to those dispositions which are alone suited to the heavenly state. We have no reason, therefore, to be astonished at that trial of the saint's faith, to which the sacred writers so frequently allude; namely, that in this lower scene of action,

vice is often triumphant, and virtue as often depressed and persecuted. Look at some fragment of an animal—some broken piece of a claw or a bone—how unsightly it appears; how unworthy of the hand of infinite skill and wisdom! But let it be seen in connexion with its corresponding parts. Let the animal stand before us in his native beauty and vigour. How perfect is the living machinery! how well it works! how seemly are its proportions! how unexceptionable the whole creature! Just so the *apparent* interruptions of God's righteous government, in this world of darkness, may be to us very strange and unsightly; yet there can be no question, that in their connexion with the universal scope of that government, they will, in the end, be found to form part of a perfectly harmonious and glorious whole.*

3. In considering the manifestations of the will of God, in nature and providence, we advert to laws with which no creature can intermeddle; for he has not only ordained them, but by the unceasing exertions of an omnipresent power, himself carries them into execution.

* See *Leibnitz, Essais sur la Theodicée.*

But there is another branch of the subject, with which we have a still more immediate and pressing concern—*The will of God respecting our own conduct*. Here he sees fit to deal with us as free and responsible agents; he permits us to choose between good and evil; he gives us a timely notice of their respective consequences; he offers his gracious aid, to enable us to walk in the way of righteousness; he *wills*, without compelling our holiness.

The will of God, as it relates to the conduct of his rational creatures, is manifested in certain permanent rules, which constitute his *moral law*; and it is one of the chief triumphs of the religion of the Bible, that it overthrows all fallacious standards of morals—such as the “fitness” of the Stoics, and the “utility” of the Epicureans—and settles every question of right and wrong, by a simple reference to the will of Omnipotence. Yet this will is itself determined by unchangeable principles of holiness, justice, benevolence, and truth. These attributes are essential to the nature of our heavenly Father; and they are the ultimate foundation of his law.*

* “The laws also by which the operations of our love

The moral laws of God, as they relate to ourselves, are the *expression* of his righteous will; and both the will and the expression of it are necessary, in order to render us responsible for our actions to the Author of our being. For in the absence of either, there can, *to us*, be no law; and “where no law is, there is no transgression.” How, then, is the moral will of God *expressed* to his creature man?

In the first place, it is revealed in the heart; so that by an intuitive perception, every man knows that virtue is right, and vice is wrong. Whatsoever may be the perversions of our conscience in the fall, there is a light which so far illuminates it, that we cannot but approve of justice, honesty, and benevolence, and condemn the contrary, both in our own actions and

are regulated, are holy, just, and good. They are not dictated by short-sightedness or inconstancy, or chargeable with any imperfections. They are holy in their origin, for they emanate from the divine perfections; they are just in their injunctions, for they have regard to the relations in which creatures stand to the Creator and to each other; they are good in their effect, for they promote the divine glory and the well-being of the universe.”—See *Joyce, Love to God*, 3d edit. pp. 103, 104.

in those of others ; and the more this light is followed in practice, the more brightly does it shine ; the more tender and effective does the conscience become. There are three elements in this matter ; first, the natural percipient power, which is conscience ; secondly, the eternal, moral truth, which is the object perceived ; and, thirdly, the light by which that moral truth is revealed, and through which, therefore, it becomes *law* to ourselves. Now I conceive that this light—whether more or less faint—is of far too pure a character to be ascribed to corrupt human nature ; and that it must rather be regarded as the gracious visitation of a divine influence, bestowed on mankind through the redemption which is in Christ.

How unspeakably would it promote our happiness, were we more obedient to the law of God, as it is written on the tablets of the heart ! In the mean time, however, the *same* law is unfolded in the holy Scriptures. It was confirmed, by revelation, to the patriarchs and prophets of old ; it formed an essential part of the Mosaic dispensation ; and, as the tables of stone on which it was written, were safely

kept in the ark of the Covenant; so is the law itself enclosed and preserved inviolate, in the bosom of Christianity.

Nothing, indeed, can be more admirable, or more clearly indicative of the wisdom of God, than the whole preceptive code of the New Testament. There the law enjoined on us, for our *practice*, not only asserts its native authority, and is unfolded in more than its ancient spirituality, but is enlarged by a variety of provisions, which belong to the character of the Christian revelation, and correspond with its extent.

Although much of *divine truth* was revealed to the ancient Israelites, we must have recourse to the New Testament for a full and explicit account of many of its features—such, for example, as the ruin and guilt of mankind in the fall; the eternity of rewards and punishments; the holiness and love of the Father, as manifested in the scheme of redemption; the deity and incarnation of the Son; the atonement made on the cross for the sins of all men; the priesthood, advocacy, and reign of Christ; and the divine character, inward work, and perpetual guidance, of the Holy

Spirit. Now, with this discovery of truth, keeps pace the *unfolding* of the Lord's precepts. In the gospel of Jesus Christ, all men are *commanded*, by a voice from heaven of inconceivable energy, to humble themselves before God; to repent of their sins; to believe in Jesus as their Saviour; to wash their polluted robes, and make them white in his blood; to open their hearts to the influence of the Holy Spirit; to abide under that influence in all things; to cease from sin; and to bring forth the fruit of righteousness, in all its ripeness, variety, and abundance. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."*

Nor are we left to conjecture what are the *particular* characteristics of that life of holiness, into which the faith of the Christian is intended to conduct him. Every separate fruit of the Spirit is distinctly set before us;

* Rom. viii. 3, 4.

and is pressed upon our attention for its own sake, and, as it were, on its own merits—love and loyalty to God, reliance on his goodness, devotion to the service of Christ, the fixing of the soul on heaven, watchfulness, perseverance in prayer, purity of heart, integrity, temperance, fortitude, patience, meekness, forbearance, long-suffering, the return of good for evil, gentleness, lowliness of mind, and that universal charity which is the bond of perfectness.

From the view which has now been taken of the manifestations of the will of God, in nature, in providence, and in grace, some conception may be formed of the comprehensiveness of that short petition—so often used, but so little understood—“*Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*” In heaven the will of God is done perfectly. No murmurs against his laws, either natural or moral, find their way into the breasts of angels and glorified spirits; no weakness of the flesh, no lingering corruption interrupts their obedience to the King of kings. Such, then, is the *mark*,

at which it is our duty constantly to *aim*. A perfect submission to the will of our heavenly Father is the *only* practical standard proposed to us by Christianity.

Now, submission to the Divine will consists of two parts—first, *resignation in suffering*; and, secondly, *obedience in acting*.

Impossible as it is for us to interfere with the dealings of God, who, in one point of view, stands apart from his creatures in solitary and awful independence, man is ever prone to murmur against them, when they do not coincide with his own views and wishes. Even the general laws of nature excite his discontent, when the particular operation of them brings him into suffering; and when, in the moral, yet mysterious order of Providence, some especial chastisement is laid upon him, he frets himself against the Lord, and calls him a hard master. In the depth of his depravity, he is even tempted to “*curse God and die.*” But Christianity bids us to cease from our complaints, and to resign ourselves, with a willing spirit, to whatsoever it may here be our lot to suffer.

This willing spirit must arise from genuine

humility in the feeling of our own demerits, and from a child-like reliance on the wisdom and goodness of God; and it must be accompanied with long patience, with cheerfulness of demeanour, with joy in the Lord, and, above all, with the heart's own melody of thanksgiving and praise. Such are the demands, and such is the power of the religion of Jesus—such the matchless alchemy by which his grace turns all things into gold.*

Again, there is nothing more distasteful to the natural man, than the piercing spirituality, the comprehensive grasp, and the binding authority of God's precepts. The child of darkness prefers his own devices—he is a rebel to the core. But Christianity requires an uncompromising compliance with the whole counsel of God, as it relates to our conduct. Our whole life must be regulated by the directions of his perfect law. No rebellious feeling, no corrupt motive or thought,

* “Our resignation to the will of God may be said to be *perfect*, when our will is lost and resolved up into his, when we rest in his will as our *end*, as being itself most just, and right, and good.”—*Bishop Butler's sermon on Love to God.*

must be harboured ; no favourite sin spared ; no unwelcome duty omitted. We must “ walk in the light as [God] is in the light,”*—implicitly following the dictates of the Holy Spirit, who guides into all righteousness.

Such being the true Scriptural standard of submission and obedience to the manifested will of God, we may proceed to apply the subject in a few practical remarks. From these it will presently appear, how intimately *divine love* is connected with the whole course of the Christian’s life and conversation.

1. If many of the known practices of professing Christians, and still more, the secret annals of our own thoughts and conduct, fail to bear a comparison with this pure and lofty standard of submission to the Divine will, the deficiency may probably arise, in the first place, from the *weakness and instability of our faith*.

A firm belief in the truth and promises of our God, and a child-like reliance on Jesus as our Saviour, are inseparably connected, as we have seen, with the preceptive code of the New Testament. Not only do they form a

* 1 John i. 7.

prominent part of our Christian duty, but they are the means of preparing us for a willing obedience to the Lord's commandments in every other respect. Good works spring from them, as a plant grows from its root. Were this truth adequately impressed upon us, we should not rest satisfied with a partial and wavering faith. We should pray to be delivered from the "heart of unbelief," as from the most dangerous of evils, and we should earnestly seek to be strengthened of the Lord, to rely upon him with a perfect affiance.

The pardoning mercies of God are in their very nature spontaneous—not bestowed upon us for any work or merit of our own, but flowing from the fathomless spring of his own compassions, through the one availing channel of Christ crucified; and *faith* is the appointed instrument by which those mercies are applied to ourselves.

"O how unlike the complex works of man,
Heaven's easy, artless, unencumber'd plan!
No meretricious graces to beguile,
No clustering ornaments to clog the pile;
From ostentation as from weakness free,

It stands like the cerulean arch we see,
Majestic in its own simplicity.
Inscribed above the portal from afar,
Conspicuous as the brightness of a star ;
Legible only by the light they give,
Stand the soul-quickenings words—*Believe and Live.*”

COWPER.

Having repented of all his transgressions, and having cast the burden of them on the Lord, the believer is no longer oppressed with the slavish fears of a condemned criminal. He enjoys the privilege of filial freedom. Delivered by a hand of infinite mercy from guilt and condemnation, he is set at liberty to run, with all diligence, in the way of God's commandments ; while the humble yet settled hope of a glorious immortality animates his zeal, and quickens his footsteps in the race of virtue.

Now, there can be no doubt, that in leading us to a living faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit very generally lays hold of the affections. He softens us and brings us into contrition. He renews us in the *spirit* of our minds ; he gives a turn to our tempers and dispositions, as it relates to God ; and thus makes way for

the opening of the blind eye—for the clearing of the spiritual understanding.

We learn from the apostle Paul, that *faith works by love*; and common experience confirms the truth of his doctrine; for although *belief* is founded on evidence, our capacity for receiving evidence in its true force, depends in no small degree on the state of our affections. How often do we find that the clearest testimonies on any subject, are all in vain for the purpose of convincing a man, if passion or self-interest happens to be ranged on the other side. So it is with Christianity. The proofs of its divine origin are strong and abundant; yet they are in general either rejected or neglected by those who love their sins and the world more than God. “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”*

But no sooner is a man’s heart made tender, than he begins to form a just estimate of Christian truth. He no longer denies either its authority or its importance. He

* John iii. 19.

embraces it readily, as his hope and his salvation; and proving his faith by his obedience, he is soon rewarded with an increase of his knowledge. The Spirit takes of the things of Christ, and unfolds them to his soul.*

* These views are in accordance with the following remarks from the pen of that *true* philosopher, Dr. Abercrombie of Edinburgh.

“It is on the principles now referred to that, according to a doctrine which has been often and keenly controverted, we hold a man to be responsible for his belief. The state of mind which constitutes belief is, indeed, one over which the will has no direct power. But belief depends upon evidence; the result of even the best evidence is entirely dependent on attention; and attention is a voluntary intellectual state, over which we have a direct and absolute control. As it is, therefore, by prolonged and continued attention that evidence produces belief, a man may incur the deepest guilt by his disbelief of truths which he has failed to examine with the care due to them. This exercise of attention is entirely under the control of the will: *but the will to exercise it respecting moral truth is closely connected with the love of that truth; and this is intimately dependent on the state of moral feeling of the mind.* It is thus that a man’s moral condition influences the conclusions of his judgment; and it is thus that, on the great questions of

Now as love makes way for faith, and faith works by love, so it is unquestionably true, that the exercise of faith—the fixing of the heart and understanding on Christ as the way, the truth, and the life—has a mighty efficacy in increasing and confirming our love to God. It brings him near to us in the perfection of his holiness, and in the fulness of his mercy; it presents him to us in Christ Jesus, as the worthy object of profound adoration and unbounded gratitude. The stronger and more simple our faith, therefore, in the truth and promises of Scripture—the more cordial and complete our reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ—the more fervent will be our love to that holy and glorious Being who is the Author of all our mercies.

2. Vain, however, will be our belief in the glad tidings of salvation through the crucified Immanuel, unless it be followed by a holy de-

moral truth, there may be guilt attached to a process of the understanding, while there is both guilt and moral degradation in that mental condition from which it sprung.”—*Philosophy of the Moral Feelings*, 2d edit. p. 167

cision of mind in giving up ourselves to God. The want of this *holy decision* may be regarded as the *second grand cause* of the imperfections which so often interrupt our conformity to the divine will. When Saul was arrested in his career of violence, by a light and voice from above, he “was not disobedient to the heavenly vision;” he surrendered at discretion to the all-conquering Saviour; forsook at once his self-righteousness and self-will, and became, without reserve, what every Christian ought to be—a *servant of the Lord*. The die was cast which forever determined his adherence to the cause of Jesus Christ and *him crucified*.

Now although the work of grace is for the most part much more gradual, the same unconditional surrender of the soul to divine visitation, is absolutely fundamental in the Christian life. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”* This declaration was true as it regarded Jesus Christ himself, who died and rose again, for the salvation of mankind; and it is also true with respect to his

* John xii. 24.

followers. They must die unto sin—their rebellious will must be given up, even unto death ; and then, under the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit, they will bring forth in abundance their fruit unto righteousness.

3. As the will rules the conduct, so the affections *move* the will ; and Christianity so excites and directs our affections, that, under divine grace, they become *motives* to an unconditional surrender of the soul to God. Our fear is brought into action by a view of his holiness, and of judgment to come ; our hope, by the promise of eternal life ; and both these perform their own part in the work of salvation ; but above all, it is *love*, drawn forth by the mercies of the Father and of Christ, and brought (as we have seen) into its full action through faith, which melts down the pride and hardness of our hearts, and *humbles us into unqualified submission*.

Had Saul been met only by storms and terrors, he might possibly have wrapped around him the mantle of self-righteousness more closely than before ; but the gentle accents of a Saviour's *love* subdued him in a moment ; and the raging Pharisee lay prostrate at the feet

of Jesus. 'The love of self, of the world, and of sin, quickly gave way to "the expulsive power of a new affection:" and it is no wonder that he afterwards pressed upon others the motive which had so mightily prevailed with himself. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by *the mercies of God*, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service; and be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.'"^{*}

The presenting of the body, that is, of *the whole man*, as a living sacrifice to the Lord, is precisely that unconditional surrender of the will, to which we are now adverting. It is the taking up of the cross of Christ, in the truest and deepest sense of the expressions—it is the giving up of the old man, with all his corruptions, to crucifixion, that the new man may be formed in us, without any obstruction on our parts, in conformity with the will of God, and "for a purpose of his glory."

* Rom. xii. 1, 2.

4. As love is the principal motive which leads to this surrender of the will, so the surrender itself is necessary to the continuance of love. If we refuse to make it, the affection which ought to have led us to it will certainly wither. On the contrary, if we bow before the Lord with unreserved submission, our love towards him will be both strengthened and enlarged; and while its energy is increased, it will be *set free* for its further operations. Saul presents his body a living sacrifice—he gives up all for Christ; and now that love for Jesus, which prompted this sacrifice, burns with ever-increasing brightness. Every successive act of his soul, in resignation or obedience to his Master's will, adds fervency to the flame. No dangers can appal him; no difficulties can stay his course; in the face of rebuke, ridicule, persecution, and death itself, he pursues the path of duty. *Love* is the abiding feeling through which he is preserved in patience; *love* the ever-acting spring which imparts to him a perpetual motion in the service of his Redeemer.

5. Let us suppose, for a moment, that the apostle's will had been only partially given up in the hour of his visitation; that instead of

quite renouncing his self-righteousness, he had persisted in partly placing his dependence on his old favourite, the law ; and that, instead of devoting himself without reserve to the best of Masters, he had partly sought his own interest and reputation as a doctor among the Jews. What would have been the consequence ? His life would have presented, for a time, a *mixture* of Christianity with pharisaical policy ; but his love for Christ, and therefore for the Father, although we may suppose it to have been sincere, would have gradually subsided ; and the mind, divided between grace and the world would, in the end, have become *absorbed* in the latter. How many thousands are there among professing Christians, whose case has now been exemplified ! They acknowledge the truth of Christianity ; they hear the glad tidings of the love of God ; they see their obligation to love him ; but they neither entirely renounce a dependence on their own works as a ground of their hope, nor fully resign themselves to the disposal and government of their Lord. The consequence is, that in the midst of a good, and sometimes even a high, profession of religion, they retain their pride, their

covetousness, and their self-indulgence. Grace grows weaker and weaker, and the world stronger and stronger, in their bosoms, until the latter becomes once more their undisputed master. How awful will it be to such as these, when death overtakes them, to enter eternity with nothing to depend upon but an empty creed; hardened in habits of mind which are utterly at variance with the joys and employments of heaven; and filled with appetites and desires which, being deprived of their corresponding objects, must henceforth, in hell, prey upon the soul itself!

6. Paul often declares himself to be “an *apostle* by the will of God.” Now we may rest assured, that had not his will been surrendered at discretion, he would neither have been enabled to lead a life of holiness, nor have been qualified for his *peculiar* path of religious duty. His whole work and service would have been marred; and he would have been comparable to nothing better than a stunted tree, bringing forth fruit destined not to ripen. Such a sacrifice of the will is indeed absolutely necessary, not merely to the general purposes of virtue, but to the *specific value and useful-*

ness of every member of the church of Christ. Do we inquire why professing Christians are often of so little use to their fellow-creatures, or to the cause of their Redeemer—why multitudes of them are found hiding their candle under a bushel—we must reply, that they have never given up *all* for Christ: and, therefore, in the very nature of things, can never experience any sufficient qualification for his service. What a blessed change would soon take place in the world, were all who profess love to God, completely given up, in heart and soul, to his righteous disposal! How numerous would be the agents of his benevolence, the messengers of his errands of mercy!—How diligent the labourers in his spiritual harvest! How rapid the *spread* of truth and happiness, in this world of darkness and sorrow!

7. We must not, however, lead the young and tender mind to expect extraordinary interpositions of divine grace, by which the leprosy of the heart shall be cured immediately, and the great conflict between the flesh and the spirit, settled *at once*. Like Naaman of old we must submit to very simple means of heal-

ing, and those means must be frequently repeated. Our true wisdom will be found in a close attention to the duty of the day—the hour—the moment. Every touch of the rod of God's providence which brings us into suffering, must be met by a corresponding readiness to submit to the infliction. Every little pointing of the divine finger, to the sacrifice of a wrong desire, or to the performance of an act of duty, must be watched with an observant eye, and followed with implicit obedience. Thus will our love to God put forth its energy on a multitude of small occasions ; it will gain new strength by its success in every step of the process ; and when our divine Master sees fit to ordain some greater trial of our allegiance, we shall find, to our inexpressible advantage, that we are HIS OWN—resigned to his disposal, and ready for his service. “ Whosoever shall do the will of God,” said Jesus to his followers, “ the same is *my brother, and my sister, and my mother.*”*

8. Here it may be well once more to advert to the fact, that the Christian's course of righteousness is inseparably connected with his

* Mark iii. 35.

faith. His obedience is the obedience of faith;* he walks “by faith, not by sight;”† the life which he now lives “in the flesh,” he lives “by the faith of the Son of God,” who “loved” us, and “gave himself” for us.‡ Not only has his original reception of the gospel led to the devotion of his soul to God, but the principles which first impelled him to the Christian race, continue to be at work in him, during the whole course of his experience. A daily recurrence to the blood of the covenant as the only ground of his hope; a constant dependence on the advocacy of the risen Saviour; an abiding trust in the providential care of that God to whom he has been reconciled; are, under grace, the very sinews of his strength, in the pursuit of heaven and happiness. And not only does he believe in the promises of God; his faith is also fixed on the commandments. Discarding mere expediency, he obeys them, and takes the consequence; and he relies, with all simplicity, on the guidance and government of the Holy Spirit. Thus, while faith sustains obedience, and obedience strengthens faith, *love*, which never fails to be mingled with them

* Rom. xvi. 26.

† 2 Cor. v. 7.

‡ Gal. ii. 20.

both, becomes the predominant affection of the soul. Love, faith, and obedience, are in a wonderful manner *interlaced* in the experience of the Christian. The same divine influence which touches our affections in order that we may believe, and enables us to believe, in order that we may obey, will also be found to act inversely. It will lead us to obey, that our faith may be thereby increased; and both to obey and believe, that our *love* may be forever fixed on our God and Saviour.

On a review of the whole subject, we must call to mind, that God manifests his will in the uniform laws of nature, which can be traced only to the *fiat* of infinite power and wisdom; in the order of providence, in which he deals with mankind on perfectly righteous principles, *apparent* difficulties being only obscure parts of one glorious whole; and in the law of practice, enacted for the guidance of his rational creatures—that this law is written on the heart, and declared in Scripture; that it formed a leading part of the Mosaic system, and is both preserved and enlarged under the gospel of Christ—that a perfect subjection to the will of God, is the only practical standard of Chris-

tianity—that this subjection consists of resignation in suffering, and obedience in acting—that these must be grounded, first, on that living faith in Christ which is inseparably connected with a right state of the affections; secondly, on a holy decision in surrendering ourselves to God—that such a surrender is prompted by love, and adds vast force to it—that the Christian is thus prepared for his whole course of virtue and piety, and that by every step which he takes in that course, his love to God is brightened and confirmed.

It is plain, therefore, that an unreserved submission to the will of our heavenly Father, is of the highest importance to the maintenance and growth of that divine affection, without which we can never be qualified for the enjoyment of heaven. Let it, however, be confessed, that this submission is in itself absolutely necessary to the happiness of the saints in glory. Affliction, indeed, can no longer call into exercise their patience and resignation; yet there can be no doubt that a blessed contentment with the stations allotted them in the kingdom of Christ, and a perfect acquiescence in the acts

and counsels of Omnipotence, form a part both of their duty and their joy. And although the faith by which they once lived on earth is now lost in vision, yet since none "hath known the mind of the Lord, or, being his counsellor, hath taught him," it is certain that this acquiescence must forever be connected with a child-like reliance on his wisdom and goodness.

Again, it is impossible for us to doubt, that an implicit obedience to the divine commands is essential, in that region of light, both to the peace of every individual and to the order and harmony of the whole community. In heaven all is tranquillity, because all is in unison with the mind of God, and subject to his righteous government. Watching and waiting for the manifestations of his will, the spirits of the just made perfect, like the angels who bear them company, are ever ready to receive his bidding. Delivered from the shackles of mortality, from all weariness and depression, and from the smallest remnant of an unsubdued will, they find their supreme delight in obeying the laws, and in executing the gracious commissions of their Father and their King.

SECTION VIII.

ON CONFORMITY WITH THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.

Nothing can be more just and undeniable than Bishop Butler's remark, that the particular affections of "reverence and love" towards "good characters," are "natural to all those who have any degree of real goodness in themselves."*

History, both ancient and modern, is, alas ! a legend of vices rather than of virtues ; but when its general complexion is relieved by the breaking forth of justice, integrity, disinterestedness, and charity—when an Aristides, a Scipio, a Regulus, and an Alfred, are presented to our view—these particular affections are at once excited ; and there are few persons

* *Sermon I. on Love to God*, p. 228. For a more extensive developement of this principle and its consequences, see Joyce's excellent work on *Love to God*, Part II.

so lost to every right feeling, as not to be sensible of a certain degree both of admiration and attachment towards such characters. But the truth of this remark is still more clearly proved by every man's experience in social life. It is the temperate, the just, the self-denying, and the merciful—it is those who are ever ready to sacrifice their own ease and comfort for the benefit of others—who obtain the esteem even of general society ; and in the narrower circle of the private family, these are the characters who are sure to attract the largest measures of love. Virtue, indeed, has often been the object of scorn and persecution, both in public and private life ; because wicked men cannot bear the light which detects and condemns their own conduct. Yet there is something in the mind of man which compels him to confess her excellence ; and no sooner are we ourselves imbued with any measure of her influence, than we feel a corresponding regard for all those who follow her guidance, and obey her laws.

“ We own and feel the force of amiable and worthy qualities in our fellow-creatures,” says Butler, “ and can we be insensible to the con-

templation of *perfect* goodness?" Forcible as is this question, experience forbids our giving to it a satisfactory reply ; for it is certain that, even among Christian nations, love to God is by no means so predominant a principle as the known prevalence of regard to human virtue might lead us to expect. While this capital defect in the sentiments and feelings of men can be traced to no other radical cause than our *corruption in the fall*, it is in a peculiar manner promoted by one of the consequences of that corruption—our natural blindness to the real attributes of a spiritual Being. So great is this blindness, that notwithstanding the most abundant evidences of his power and benevolence, multitudes who are by no means destitute of a regard for virtue, neglect and forget him "days without number." Again, until the true light of the Gospel of Christ breaks in upon the soul, men are more likely to be affected by the awful parts of the Divine character, and to shrink from the presence of their Judge, than to accept and admire him as a *God of love*.

But how different is the whole train of our feelings, when the religion of Jesus has become

influential in the mind! Christianity brings God very near to us. He meets the perception of his reconciled children in every flower that blossoms, in every star that shines, and in every cloud that floats across the sky. They find him in daily, hourly contact with themselves, in his providential mercies, in his paternal care. Above all, his *holiness* on the one hand, and his *love* on the other, are illustriously displayed to them in the scheme of redemption. In *Christ*, God is revealed in all the beauty and majesty of his moral perfections.

When through the influence of the Holy Spirit, we *thus* know him, we cannot do otherwise than revere and love him; and although these affections on our parts fall infinitely short of his claims upon us, they fully confirm the general principle, that moral excellence attracts *love*. They are the legitimate effect, on our minds, of God's *infinite goodness*.

We may now advert to a *second principle* of much practical importance—that the love which good characters excite in the minds of men who have “any spark of goodness” in themselves, is always accompanied by a de-

sire to imitate the pattern which they admire and approve. What ingenuous person can find his best affections drawn forth by noble and generous characters in the history of his country, without feeling some ardent wishes to act on the same principles of virtue and charity? The force of example is felt even in large communities; and goodness, under the divine blessing, is often diffused in society, through the tendency, so common amongst men, to imitate those of their neighbours who are the objects of their regard. The same principle applies with redoubled force to the domestic circle. When we are instructed and comforted from day to day by the good conduct of our dearest friends, it is impossible for us (if our minds be in any degree under a right influence) not to desire—and almost impossible not to *endeavour*—to be of the same mind, the same character.

But it is in religion that this principle finds its highest application. When God has been brought near to us in the gospel of his Son—when we have been taught to regard and love him as a Being of infinite holiness and benevolence—the Spirit which awakens these af-

fections, never fails to excite in us an earnest desire to become conformed, in our own character, to his moral attributes. This, indeed, is a test by which we may try our love; for if such a desire is strange to us, we may rest assured that our affections have never been rightly excited towards him. There is something in the inmost feelings of every true believer, which responds to that awful precept, “Be ye holy, *for I am holy.*”*

God created man in his own image—after his own likeness. Not only did he furnish him with the lamp of reason, and introduce him to the high destinies of eternity, but he formed him upon the pattern of his own character. The soul of the creature was stamped with the moral impress of the Creator. But man is fallen; he has lost the image of his heavenly Father; through the stratagems of Satan, he is become a sinner and a child of wrath; and now there is no deliverance for him, but through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ.

What, then, is the great *practical* object of the scheme of redemption, and of that whole process of faith and obedience, which has been

* 1 Pet. i. 16.

described in the preceding section? It is the recovery of man's lost character—his restoration to the likeness of his Creator. Utterly lost as he is to holiness, he has no more power to work out his cure by any strength or wisdom of his own, than has the dead body, mouldering in the grave, to live, arise, and walk. But when he is imbued, by a power beyond his own, with a living faith in God, set free from condemnation through the blood of Jesus, and subjected to the purifying influences of the Holy Spirit—he experiences a gracious, a vital change. Enamoured with the beauty of the Holy One of Israel, and panting after a resemblance to his righteous attributes, he bends the whole forces of his soul to the race of holiness; and, behold, he becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. He *puts off*, “concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;” he *puts on* “the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”* Thus is the love of the Christian towards that Being, in whom all loveliness dwells, graciously re-

* Eph. iv. 22. 24.

warded by a daily increasing resemblance to the highest object of his regard.

But in the midst of our best endeavours to be *followers of God*, and to resemble, in point of moral character, the Author of our being; it is impossible for us to forget the infinite elevation of the unsearchable Creator, above *man*, that worm of the earth, that poor groveller in the dust. Hence it seems to follow, that in our endeavours to scale the height of assimilation to God, there would be the utmost danger of our being appalled, and of our falling back, in despair, into the depths of our own weakness, were it not that the righteousness of God is brought home to our familiar perceptions in his *incarnate Son*. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, *in the face (or person) of Jesus Christ.*”*

Christ is the image of God, in whom all the moral attributes of the Deity were displayed, and as it were personified; and at the same time he has afforded us a perfect pattern

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

of that unqualified submission to the Father's will, which belongs to our relation towards God, and without which we can never recover his likeness. When the Son of God quitted his throne of glory, and took upon him the nature of man, he did, indeed, surrender himself without reserve to the decrees of infinite wisdom and goodness; nor can it be doubted that the sacrifice was prompted by unutterable love towards him who commanded it, as well as by compassion for our fallen race. Then said he, "Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me; I *delight* to do thy will, O my God."*

With this unparalleled act of self-renunciation, his subsequent resignation in suffering the will of God, and faithfulness in doing it, were completely on a level. Subjected as he was, without a murmur, to his Father's designs respecting him, his language in the depth of conflict, and in the immediate prospect of his propitiatory death, was, "not as I will, but as thou wilt." "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers

* Ps. xl. 7, 8.

is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.” Again, so entirely conformed was he in action, to the will of God, that the words which he spoke were his Father’s words, and the works which he wrought, his Father’s works.* “My meat,” said he, “is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.”†

While he was thus conformed to the will of his Father, he gloriously fulfilled his own precept, “Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” He was the Holy One of God, a Lamb without blemish and without spot; wisdom and prudence were in him united with unbending integrity and undaunted courage, and his words were the very truth; his patience and fortitude surmounted every difficulty; he was forever engaged in acts of beneficence—in labouring for the welfare of the bodies and souls of men; his temper was unruffled as the dove’s; he was meek, gentle, forbearing, long-suffering, tender-hearted; magnanimous and zealous in his Father’s cause, but ever ready to forgive the insults and injuries which were heaped upon himself; although infinitely worthy of

* John xiv. 10, &c.

† John iv. 34.

exaltation, he was “lowly in heart;” his charity knew no bounds; his love to God and man was ever-flowing, like the waves of the ocean.

What a precious evidence is it of the loving-kindness of our God, as well as of the truth of our holy religion, that we are thus furnished with an example, in which his whole moral law is embodied for our instruction, and in such a form as powerfully to engage our best affections! If there is any thing of Divine grace in our souls, we cannot fail to love that perfectly lovely One who is thus presented, in a glowing picture, to our notice; and our affection for him will, in the very nature of things, be accompanied by a cordial desire to follow his example.

Let some ingenuous youth be placed under the care and instruction of an elder brother, with whom he feels a happy freedom, but whose good qualities excite at once his reverence and his love. We shall be sure to find him insensibly moulding himself upon his favourite model. Almost without an intention, he will speak in the same voice, behave in the same manner, and adopt the same sentiments. He

will be constantly approaching nearer and nearer to his pattern, in thought, demeanour conduct, and character. So ought it to be—so will it be, if his faith and love are genuine—with the Christian towards his Saviour. Let all who bear the name of Christ, fix their regards on their glorious Elder Brother, the First-begotten from the dead, who was crucified for their sins, and lives for their salvation. Let them cultivate their love for him, by taking a frequent view of his perfections; and let this love have its free course in leading them to imitate their model. In constant dependence on the aid of the Holy Spirit, let them humbly endeavour to imbibe his mind, and follow his footsteps. Let them look well to it, that their hearts be conformed to the purity which is in Jesus; and that they be clad in the same garment of gentleness, meekness, charity, and humility.

Now, as the Christian character is gradually formed in obedience to the precepts of Jesus, and *after his example*, the image of God is renewed in the soul. Utterly insignificant as he is in himself, man becomes once more conformed to the righteous character of his

Creator ; the holiness and benevolence of the Deity are again reflected in his demeanour and conduct, as the face of a man is reflected in a mirror. “ But we all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

It appears, then, *first*, that when there is any spark of goodness in men, their love and regard is naturally attracted by virtuous characters ; and that, although this principle, *as it respects God*, is grievously hindered by the weakness and corruption of our nature, it is, nevertheless, verified by the experience of every true Christian ;—*secondly*, that our attachment to persons distinguished by moral excellence, is inseparably connected with some desire to imitate their example—that the Christian is inspired with an earnest solicitude to be a follower of God himself—that the restoration of men to that image of the Creator, which they have lost through the fall, is the main practical purpose of Christianity—and that this purpose can be accomplished only as they are formed on the model of his incarnate Son.

* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

So far, then, the argument is clear; but there is a third point to which we must advert in order to complete our view of the subject. *The degree of our love to holy beings, is always in proportion to the degree of our own holiness.*

Just as our relish for the elegancies of a language keeps pace with our proficiency in the knowledge of it—just as the excellence of some well painted picture, although hidden from the unpractised eye, is at once detected by that of an artist—just as the greatest delight in the charms of nature, is ever felt by those who have been nursed in contemplating them, the mind which is most exercised in virtue never fails to be the most alive to its goodness and beauty.

The more any community of men is set free from degrading and vicious practices, the greater will be their esteem for their virtuous members. The more the child is strengthened in his moral principles, the more he will love the parent in whose conduct those principles are displayed.

From these premises, it plainly follows, that precisely in proportion to the Christian's im-

provement in holiness, will be the increase of his love to a holy God and Saviour. Let the work of sanctification go forward in our souls, and what will be the blessed consequence?—Our sense of the glory and excellence of the Divine character will be refined and exalted; our hatred for sin, and our reverence for righteousness, will become determined; and the love which leads us to imitate the Saviour, will grow stronger and stronger as the process of assimilation advances. The more we resemble him and partake of his mind and character, the warmer will be our regard for him, and the closer that bond of union in which we can say, with the church of old, “My beloved is mine, and I am his.”* And in being thus brought nearer to the Son, we are brought nearer to the Father also. Every element of discord and separation between God and his children is gradually removed; and as sin disappears, *love* triumphs over all.

It is, therefore, through the gradual conformation of the character to the moral attributes of the Deity, that our love to God is matured and perfected. But while this love

* Cant. ii. 19.

may fairly be regarded as the main qualification for the enjoyments of a better world, let it never be forgotten that an actual resemblance to the purity of the Deity, is in itself indispensable to our admission into heaven. Never can we take possession of the eternal inheritance which Christ has purchased for us with his blood, unless we be restored to that likeness of Jehovah, in which our first parents were created. Without holiness “no man shall see the Lord.”* “There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”†

What tongue can tell, what heart conceive the joy which is reserved in heaven for those who have here, by the work of grace, been *assimilated* to Jesus Christ? “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”‡ If, even in this world, we have been taught to love God

* Heb. xii. 14. † Rev. xxi. 27. ‡ 1 John iii. 2.

because of his moral perfections, and if our love for him has ever been found to increase as we ourselves have been enabled to advance in holiness, what will be the measure of our love—what, therefore, the fulness of our happiness—when the moral beauty of the Deity shall be revealed to us in all its radiance, while our own capacity for appreciating it is unutterably enlarged! Forever likened to their Saviour, the risen and glorified children of the Lord will experience, in heaven, the perfect blending of love and holiness; and both these will be forever associated with unclouded joy.

SECTION IX.

ON LOVE TOWARDS MAN.

EXPERIENCE affords many proofs that men, being evil, “know how to give good gifts” unto their “children.” The father of a family provides food for his wife and little ones, by the labour of his hands; and is constrained to do so by the gentle yet constant impulse of natural affection. The mother watches with ceaseless care over the couch of her sick infant, and is urged by feelings of a most tender character to soothe its sufferings, even at the cost of her own ease and comfort. Brothers and sisters, relations and friends, are perpetually enjoying each other’s company, and assisting one another by a thousand little offices of kindness. In some of these instances, especially in that of the watchful mother, something may be placed to the account of natural instinct; yet we cannot deny, that benevolence has its share of influence in

producing these effects ; and this quality becomes still more conspicuous when men are found to be willing, as they very generally are, to relieve the distresses of their fellow-men, with whom they have little or no connexion, but that of a common nature. A heathen could say, "*Homo sum, et nihil humani a me alienum puto.*"—"I am a man ; and I consider nothing belonging to my fellow-men, foreign to my care."

It is impossible to deny the existence of these kindly dispositions in man ; and it would be ungrateful to our gracious Creator, to under-rate their value. Yet I conceive, that were they analyzed under the light of truth, they would be found to yield but little credit to corrupt human nature. No small proportion of selfishness might, after all, be discovered in their *basis* ; and whatsoever was found in the combination of a lovelier character, might, perhaps, be traced to the secret working of an influence from above. In the mean time, it is affecting to observe, how soon, under the sway of prejudice, ambition, and covetousness, these amiable tendencies are exchanged, even for *desperate* cruelty. What became of natural

affection during the persecutions of the early Christians, when brother delivered up his brother, and father his child, to the most barbarous deaths? Where was the benevolence of our species, when whole nations were wasted, and rivers of blood shed by the sword of Jengis Khan, or of Napoleon? Of what force is that benevolence in comparison with filthy lucre, among the wretches who tear unoffending men from their homes—press them in multitudes into the holds of their ships—and receive the price by which they are consigned to bondage?

The plain fact is, that the affection of *love*, in the breast of man, will never be regulated on principles of true morality, or be found of a pure and stable character, until it be directed, in the first place, to that glorious Being who is its proper and supreme object. It is when our love has been taught to flow, in an undivided stream, towards God, that it pursues its course—or rather, that it is sent back from him—with a force unknown before, towards all who stand in the same relation to him as ourselves; for we are all children of one Father

Let us picture to ourselves some large family

of sons and daughters, who have been cherished, with an impartial regard, by their earthly parents. Should these children make no return for parental kindness but indifference and neglect, it is morally impossible that there should be any stable principle in their friendship for each other; the bond subsisting among them must be loose and uncertain in the extreme. But should they, on the contrary, be virtuous, the love of every child in the fireside group, would flow without restriction, in the first place, towards his parents; and, in the next place, towards his brothers and sisters, those equal sharers with himself of a father's tenderness and a mother's care. But let us suppose that these fond parents, in addition to the usual offices of love, had made some vast sacrifice, or had undergone incredible fatigue and suffering, for the benefit of all their children—say, for the purpose of redeeming them from bondage. Here would be a new and distinct call on every child for gratitude towards the parents; and a fresh tie to bind all the children together in love. They all owe their existence, under divine Providence, to the same father and mother; they are all objects of the

same parental love and care : above all, they have all been redeemed from a cruel bondage, through the same parental *suffering*. Irresistible, therefore, are the feelings which impel them first to love their parents ; and next, *through the medium of this filial affection*, to attach themselves to each other.

The claims of our heavenly Father on our love and gratitude, are incomparably superior to those of any earthly parent ; and when these claims are acknowledged and felt, our love to our fellow-men, the common objects with ourselves of his goodness, both in creation and providence, rests on a secure basis ; it becomes what it never was before, a *heaven-born* affection. But what vast additional force is imparted to this affection, through the gospel of our Redeemer ! When the great truth is impressed on our hearts, that God sent his own Son into the world to save us—even to redeem us—by his death on the cross, from the pains of hell, and from the slavery of sin and Satan—our love cannot fail to flow and abound. We are gently constrained, under a divine influence, first to love the Lord our God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent ; and, next, to

love that universal family of man, for whom Christ died.—“If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”*

Again, we have seen that they who truly love God, are distinguished by a cordial desire and endeavour to resemble the object of their regard. But there is not one of his moral attributes more clearly placed within the scope of our perception and imitation than his *love to man*.†

It appears, therefore, that there is something more than a bare succession—that there is *sequence*, in the sense of cause and effect—in the two great commandments of the law of God. When the lawyer questioned Jesus, saying, “Master, which is the great commandment of the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great command-

* 1 John iv. 11.

† “God is love. Can those who love him, and who ardently desire to resemble him, *refuse to bear the image of this divine attribute*, and with all the helps and powerful incentives to mutual affection, remain indifferent to one another?”—*Joyce, Love to God*. 3d edit. p. 113.

ment. And the second is like unto it, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF.*

What then is the *extent*, and what the *measure* of this second commandment?

1. *Extent.* The ancient Jews were accustomed, as a people, to dwell alone. Separated as they were, both by their civil and religious habits, from the heathen nations which surrounded them, it was not without divine authority, that they looked upon themselves as a select community, the peculiar heritage of the Lord. Hence they were not, in general, prepared to salute any man as their neighbour, or *friend*, (as in the Hebrew,) who was not of the commonwealth of Israel; and the command to love their neighbour was, in their view, equivalent to the precept that they should love one another. But the gospel, which broke down the middle wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles, has imparted a far wider significance to the term *neighbour*; as is very evident from some of our Lord's discourses.

The Samaritans were a people quite distinct from the Jews; they were Cuthites from Chal-

* Matt. xxii. 35—39.

dæa, who were planted in the territory of the ten tribes, by their victorious enemy, Salmannassar, king of Assyria. Yet we find, from that exquisite parable by which Jesus answered the lawyer's question on the subject before us, that the *good Samaritan* was neighbour to the *Jew* who fell among thieves ; and proved himself to be so, by exercising towards him the offices of Christian charity. And as the term is strictly reciprocal, it of course follows that the Jew was also neighbour to the Samaritan.

Hence it appears, that under the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, all men of every colour and country who fall under our notice, or are within the reach of our influence, must be regarded as our neighbours ; and that it is our duty to love them as we love ourselves. Nor does the mere distance of the party from us, deprive him of this character ; for Christianity is a diffusive religion. Under its influence, *we have to do* with millions whom we have never seen ; and while it in no degree weakens the pre-eminent claims upon us, of our own countrymen, it supplies us with neighbours whom it is our duty to serve, in the remotest part of the habitable globe. When the apostle

were commanded to go forth and proclaim the glad tidings of salvation to every creature under heaven, they were taught, by the very command itself, to regard *every creature under heaven* as their neighbour and their friend.

But the Samaritans were not only of a different stock from the Jews; the two nations were at enmity with each other. Samaritan adversaries hindered the rebuilding of Jerusalem, in the days of Artaxerxes; and so obstinate was this national dislike, that when Jesus and his disciples, many hundred years afterwards, were passing through a Samaritan village, even the opportunity to obtain food was refused them, because their faces were set “to go to Jerusalem.”* Nor was the spirit of the Jews towards this people in any degree less hostile: “The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans.”† It appears, then, that the enmity of any persons, or of any nations of men, against ourselves, has no effect in removing them from the class of our *neighbours*; we must still love them, and treat them as our friends. In short, the term “neighbour,” in

* Luke ix. 53.

† John iv. 9.

this comprehensive law, extends, under the gospel, without any kind of exception, *to the whole family of our fellow-men*. “The Lord,” said the apostle to the Thessalonians, “make you to increase and abound in love one towards another, and towards ALL MEN.”*

* 1 Thess. iii. 12.

That *war* is an anti-Christian practice, is a position which few serious persons will refuse to admit as true; and a candid examination of facts can scarcely fail to extort the further confession, that sinful as it is in its own nature, it is no solitary evil, but prolific of innumerable transgressions against the divine law. It brings into play all the worst passions of our nature; it is followed by fraud, robbery, rapine, and unbridled licentiousness and cruelty. Above all, it tramples on the sacredness of human life, mocks at the doctrine of man's immortality, and is full of *murder*.

Can any one deny that our Lord's plain precept, *love your enemies*, virtually abolishes the warfare of the world, both for individuals and for nations? Is it possible for us to *love* our enemies and to *destroy* them simultaneously?

May the happy day speedily arrive, when Christians will universally withdraw from all participation in this tremendous sin! “We no longer take up the sword against any nation,” said Origen to Celsus, “neither do

2. The *measure* of the love which the Christian is required to bear towards his neighbour, is the love which he lawfully entertains for himself—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as *thyself*." Although the love of self is miserably perverted and exaggerated in the fall, so that, in point of fact, it has become *self-worship*, there can be no doubt that this affection, within its true limits, belongs to man's original nature, and forms an important part of his mental constitution. It is the affection which leads us, by a never-failing impulse, to seek our own safety and happiness; and, when rectified by Divine grace, and applied *in a right direction*, it becomes a pow-

we learn any more to make war. We have become, for the sake of Jesus, the *children of peace*." Again he says, "by such means (that is, by our prayers) we fight for our king abundantly; but we *go not with him to war*, even though he *urge us* $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \epsilon\pi\epsilon\lambda\gamma\eta$."—Lib. v. 33, *Ed. Ben.* i. 602; lib. viii. 73, *Ed. Ben.* i. 797. "Hitherto I have fought for thee," said Martin, a converted soldier, to the Emperor Julian, "permit me now to fight for my God. Let those who are about to engage in battle accept thy donative. I am the soldier of Christ; for me the *combat is unlawful*." *Sulpit. Sev. de Vitâ B. Martin*, *Ed. Amst.* p. 445.

erful instrument for our good.—Now, the Christian's love for his neighbour ought to be precisely the same *in character*, as his love for himself—strong, constant, well-principled, and effective. It ought also to be the same *in degree*; so far as to lead us to do unto others, as we would have them, under the same circumstances, do unto ourselves.

Observe the courses of the planets round the sun. They cannot fly off into endless space—the *centripetal* force prevents them; they cannot fall to the sun in the centre, and perish in his flames—the *centrifugal* force preserves them at their right distance. Under that Almighty hand by which they were first adjusted, the two forces, in their opposite and equal operation, are the means of preserving the whole solar system in its admirable order. Just so would it be in the mutual relations of men, were the love of self *matched*, as it ought to be, by pure benevolence. The affection which seeks the centre of self, and that which shuns it for the benefit of others, would balance and counteract each other; and the blessed result, under the grace of God, would be the peace and harmony of our whole species.

3. A high sense of honour, even in men of a worldly character, ought by no means to be undervalued; for it is right in itself, and greatly promotes the happiness of mankind. Yet how often do we find persons, who are by no means destitute of this quality, working abundance of ill to their neighbours! Under the influence of their respective passions, the duellist, the gamester, and the sensualist—although they may all *scorn* what they deem a breach of honour—have little hesitation in inflicting injuries on their fellow-creatures, which are utterly opposed to *immutable justice*. Hence we may perceive the true force of the apostle's doctrine, that all the laws which forbid our injuring other men, are briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” “Love,” he adds, “worketh no ill to his neighbour;” therefore, “love is the fulfilling of the law.”* If this love had always prevailed among professing Christians, where would have been the sword of the crusader? Where the tortures of the Inquisition? Where every system of oppression and wrong by which he who has the power

* Rom. xiii. 9, 10.

revels in luxury and ease at the expense of his fellow-man?

Love, indeed, imparts both eyes and wings to justice. It is when our depraved affections are rectified, that we take an enlightened view of the relations of our fellow-men towards ourselves, and of the claims on our *justice*, which those relations involve. Again, it is love which makes us *swift* to shun the evil which justice forbids, and to do the good which she demands. At the same time, it cannot be denied, that under the *softening* touches of religion, charity and mercy are sometimes found to be easier to frail man than the *hardier virtue of strict integrity*. This is a point of danger which requires a peculiar guard, and which is too often neglected, to the great loss and injury of the cause of Christ. Let it ever be remembered, that the unbending maintenance of the *rule of right* towards our fellow-men, is the *first and most indispensable* result of that holy law: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

4. When we are conscious that we have fulfilled the claims of justice, our charity has free scope; and if we abide under the influence

of Divine grace, it will soon be found exerting itself in every direction.

Were we in temporal distress ourselves—sick, impoverished, afflicted, or imprisoned—we should certainly desire the sympathy and assistance of our fellow-men; and, therefore, by the royal law of love, we are bound to extend our pity and help, as far as our means and opportunities permit, to all who need it. If we neglect these obvious duties, vain are our professions of faith and love. “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works, can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding, ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?”* Again, “Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”†

All men are our brethren by creation; and we cannot doubt that to all men these offices of kindness are due, as occasion offers. Yet

* James ii. 14—16.

† 1 John iii. 17.

it may not be wholly useless to observe, that in relieving the temporal distresses of the poor, Christian love will lead us to aim at their *substantial and permanent* welfare. While it may even check the hand of indiscriminate almsgiving, it will teach us to inquire into the *sources* of poverty, and *there* to apply our remedies. Above all, we shall endeavour to set those principles at work in their minds, by which they may be induced to feel their own independence, and help themselves.

In the mean time, those who are suffering from peculiar calamities, will claim a corresponding care. In these matters we may find an admirable pattern in a very ancient philanthropist: "When the ear heard me," said Job, "then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the *fatherless*, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was *ready to perish* came upon me; and I caused the *widow's* heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness and it clothed me, my *judgment* was as a robe and a diadem; I was eyes to the

blind; and feet was I to the *lame*. I was a *father to the poor*, (the stable protector of their true interests;) and the *cause which I knew not I searched out.*"*

5. But the law of love to our neighbour, and its corresponding "golden rule," are far, indeed, from being restricted, as to their object, to the poor and distressed among men. They teach us to fulfil our Christian duties towards the king upon his throne; towards "magistrates who are sent by him;" towards all who have a just authority over us; towards our equals and associates; towards those who are placed under our care, or are engaged in our service—in fact, *through the whole train of our relations in life*. Under the blessed influence of love, it is the office of *justice*, to "render unto *all* their dues," and to refrain from injuring any man in word, thought, or deed; and it is that of *charity*, to impart to others as much happiness as it is in our power to bestow. Bitterness, wrath, envy and *detraction*, must all disappear under the melting ray of the law of love; and in their place, must spring up kindness, universal good-will

* Job xxix. 11—16.

tenderness of spirit, forbearance, the willing preference of others, and Christian courtesy. Divine love alone will render us good citizens of this evil world, and polish us into true gentlemen. “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, (or, *love*,) it profiteth me nothing.—Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is CHARITY.”*

6. Were we to inquire of the Christian, which of all his privileges he most dearly prizes, he would not fail to answer—the knowledge of *divine truth*; and the blessed hope of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. How, then, can he love his neighbour as himself—how can he do to others as he would that

* 1 Cor. xiii. 3—13.

others (under like circumstances) should do to him—without endeavouring to communicate to his fellow-men these dearest of blessings? If Christian charity constrains him to be ever on the watch for the temporal benefit of his fellow-men, how much more for their spiritual and eternal welfare!

The ministry of the gospel of Christ is pre-eminently a work of *love*. Under the influence of this pure affection towards God and man, the first preachers of Christianity were brought into sympathy with the condition of the people; and they were made willing to undergo every description of privation and suffering, and even to offer up their lives, in order to make known to sinners the crucified and risen Saviour. “Neither count I my life dear unto myself,” said the apostle Paul, “so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”* There can be no doubt that the same blessed motive was powerfully at work in the mind of an Eliot, a Brainerd, a Schwartz, and

* Acts xx. 24.

a Martyn ; and can never fail to characterize every true-hearted minister of the gospel, both at home and abroad. Would that an increasing multitude of servants, actuated by no other motive than that of love, and depending on no other influence than that of the Holy Spirit, might be raised up to publish the truth of God in every part of this dark and degenerate world ! Would that there were a response in the hearts of tens of thousands, to the call of Jesus and his Spirit, “ Go ye into all the world,* and preach the gospel to every creature.”*

Yet it must not be forgotten that while this call is in its nature select and specific, the work of diffusing a knowledge of the truth is by no means restricted to the ministers of the gospel. The harvest field of the world is large and various ; giving scope for labour of many different kinds ; and there is not a Christian upon earth who ought not, in some way or other, to promote the common cause. The distribution of the Bible, the scriptural education of the poor, the diffusion of religious tracts, are means of

* Mark xvi. 15.

extending the kingdom of Christ, to which no man can fairly object, and which most men have some opportunity of promoting. Other means, suited to the various modifications of our opinions and feelings, abound on every side ; so that if there be a heart for the work, some way to perform it is sure to offer itself.

“Sow in the morn thy seed,
At eve hold not thy hand ;
To doubt and fear give thou no heed—
Broad cast it round the land !”

MONTGOMERY.

In addition to efforts of this description, services of a more directly personal nature, are frequently required of us, for the benefit of our fellow-men. For every Christian has his own circle of influence, and ought to be a centre for the diffusion of light to all whom that circle comprises. Were we more strongly actuated by divine love, more willing to take up our cross and confess the Lord who bought us, how often would the words of friendly admonition, of timely warning, or of warm encouragement, flow from our lips ! While a holy discretion would still be carefully cherished, how conspicuously would our zeal for the salvation of

souls overcome the withering influence of the fear of man ! Above all, how watchful should we be that our example might always *tell* on the side of truth and righteousness—that our whole demeanour and conduct might utter the language—come and have fellowship with us “because our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”*

In holding up our love for ourselves as the general standard of our love to our neighbour the divine law by no means requires us to regard all men *equally*. It is rather intended as I conceive, to enforce the principle so clearly unfolded in the “golden rule ;” and to teach us that we should *so feel* and behave towards every man, as we would have him feel and behave towards ourselves, were the position of the two parties *reversed*. Hence the degree of our love for our fellow-men may lawfully vary ; and it ought in fact precisely to correspond with the nature and character of their *relations* towards us.

I am living, it may be, in a certain town, and I feel a sincere regard for all its inhabitants

* 1 John i. 3.

but there are my father, my mother, my brothers, and my sisters ! These are bound to me by a far closer tie than the rest of my fellow-citizens, and they are objects of a much warmer and nearer affection. Who can wonder then that the followers of our Lord Jesus Christ—the members of that flock and family which he has purchased with his own blood—are, with a *peculiar* emphasis, commanded to *love one another* ?

“The kindred links of life are bright,
Yet not so bright as those
In which Christ’s favour’d friends unite,
And each on each repose.
Where all the hearts in union cling,
With him the centre and the spring.”

ANON.

I have already endeavoured to show that our love to our fellow-men, if of the right quality, is inseparably connected with the blessing which we derive, in union with them, from the same God and Father. We love them all as our brethren by Creation, the common objects with ourselves, of the tender mercies of Jehovah, and even of his redeeming love. But true

Gurney.

Christians are the children of God by adoption ; they are a chosen generation, a peculiar people ; theirs is the treasure of saving grace in this world ; theirs the hope of unfading happiness and glory, in the world to come. Just in proportion, therefore, to the pre-eminence of the favours which they are receiving at the hands of their Father, and their Redeemer, must be the pre-eminence of that love which draws and binds them one to another.

The precepts of our Saviour and his apostles on this subject are numerous and clear.—
“ A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another. . . . By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”* “ Be kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love, in honour preferring one another.”† “ Seeing ye have purified yourselves in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.”‡ “ Beloved, let us love one another ; for love is of God ; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God

* John xiii. 34, 35. † Rom. xii. 10. ‡ 1 Pet. i. 22

. . . . God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.”*

It would seem that the apostle John's love for his brethren was in proportion to that especial affection with which he was himself loved of his Master; and it is said, that in the extremity of his old age, his public addresses to the churches were all reduced to one—“Little children, love one another.” But it is not merely by the frequent repetition of such precepts that we are taught the *pre-eminence* of that love which Christians are required to exercise towards each other. The Scriptures have affixed to it its peculiar standard; and while we are commanded to love all mankind as we do ourselves, we are enjoined to love our Christian brethren after a still higher measure—even as *Christ has loved us*. “This is my commandment,” said Jesus to his disciples, “that ye love one another, *as I have loved you*.”† “Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love, *as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us*.”‡

* 1 John iv. 7. 16. † John xv. 12; comp. xiii. 34.

‡ Eph. v. 1, 2.

“As we have, therefore, opportunity,” said the apostle Paul, “let us do good unto all men, *especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*”* These, indeed, have a peculiar claim upon us, not only for sympathy and kindly affection, but for the willing sacrifices of an unwearied benevolence. It is a remarkable circumstance, that acts of kindness to the brethren of Christ—that is, to the living members of his church—are mentioned as the *test* of that love to Christ himself, by which we must all be appreciated in the day of judgment—“Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it UNTO ME.”†

This doctrine may serve to show us how *great* are the sacrifices which we ought to be willing to make for the benefit of our fellow-believers. “Hereby perceive we the love of (Christ,) because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to *lay down our lives* for the brethren.”‡

Yet the same principle applies to the smallest offices of Christian kindness; “He that

* Gal. vi. 10. † Matt. xxv. 40. ‡ 1 John iii. 16.

receiveth you," said our Saviour, "receiveth me, and he that receiveth me, *receiveth him that sent me* And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the *name of a disciple*, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."* From this passage we may derive an important hint, that as the minor duties of Christian kindness are due to all men among whom our lot is cast, so they ought to be observed, with a *peculiar nicety of feeling*, towards our brethren and sisters in the fellowship of the gospel.

Christianity is distinguished by nothing more strikingly, than by the force and tenderness of its sympathies; and those who are united to the same holy Head, ought surely to be ever ready both to weep and to rejoice in unison. If forbearance, gentleness, and courtesy are due to all men, how plainly ought they to mark our conduct towards those who are of the household of faith! If that charity, which shuns all unseemly behaviour, and is ever ready to look upon others with a favour-

* Matt. x. 40—42

able eye, must be exercised towards our neighbours *generally*, how ought it to live and abound towards the Lord's flock and family ! If the tongue of detraction is unlawful, even when aimed against his enemies, how shameful does it become when it inflicts an injury on a Christian brother or sister !

It appears that every good deed done to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, is graciously recorded in our favour, as if it were done to Christ. And equally certain is it, that every injury which we inflict on a fellow-believer in Jesus, knowing him to be such, is an offence pointed against Jesus himself. What need, then, have Christians to exert a holy care and watchfulness, that no jarring elements of discord interrupt their harmony ; that they entertain no hard thoughts of their brethren ; and that they be subject one to another in love ! “ If there be, therefore, any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory ; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem

other better than themselves. Look not every man at his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus," &c.*

Nor are the good offices due from us to our fellow-believers by any means confined to matters of an outward nature ; for Christians are called upon to be helpers one of another in their spiritual course. They must, individually, endeavour to build up their brethren in that holy faith which was "once delivered to the saints ;" they must provoke to love and to good works ; by joint and reciprocal efforts, the whole church must "edify itself in love." How often are the disciples of Jesus cheered on their way by the help and encouragement which they derive from each other : how often do they find, to their joy and comfort, that as "iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend!"† And what ought to be our conduct towards those who love the Lord Jesus, but are, nevertheless, overcome, for a season, by the enemy of their souls ? "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye

* Phil. ii. 1—5.

† Prov. xxvii. 17.

which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness ; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*"*

There was once a people consisting of six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, who had long been groaning, in a land foreign to their forefathers, under the oppression of one of the worst of tyrants. But having been chosen of God as his own peculiar family, they were delivered from all their thralldom by a miraculous interposition of his power. A dry path was made for them through the deeps of an extensive sea ; and while their enemies who pursued them perished in the waves, they soon found themselves in safety in a vast wilderness which lay on the other side. Through this wilderness it was ordained that they should pass, before they could arrive at a fruitful and delightful land, which was promised them for their inheritance ; but in the mean time, they were provided with a wise and benevolent commander, with daily bread from heaven, with pure water from the bosom of

* Gal. vi. 1, 2.

rocks, and with the sure guidance of a divine messenger, who went before them in a cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night.

Alas, for this people!—with the exception of a few faithful ones, they rebelled against God, and their carcasses fell in the wilderness. But had they continued in their uprightness, how fervently would they have loved the Lord, whose daily mercies they so richly experienced, and how closely would their love for each other have been cemented by UNION! The grounds of that union were strong and palpable, indeed. They all worshipped the same God: they had all been delivered from the same bondage, and had made their escape by the same path through the waters; they all served the same captain, were all fed and refreshed by the same miraculous supplies, were all guided in their march by the same angel of the covenant; they all contended against the same enemies; and, animated with one design, they were all pressing forward towards the same happy country. How could they do otherwise than confess their bond of union, and cleave to one another in love? To suppose them falling out by the way, merely because the twelve tribes of

which they were composed, bore different names and lodged in different parts of the encampment, is to suppose a hideous anomaly—an unaccountable departure, both from reason and rectitude.

This picture affords no unfair representation of the Christian church, which consists of *all under every name who are brought to “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

They are the chosen and adopted children of one Father; living worshippers of one God; delivered by one miraculous power, from the bondage of sin and Satan; led into safety by one consecrated path; partakers of one heavenly bread; refreshed by one gladdening stream of the waters of life; followers of one all-conquering captain; guided by one Divine light; animated by one blessed hope; in pursuit of one holy and glorious inheritance.—Above all, they are actually baptized by one spirit into one body. Theirs, therefore, is the blessed privilege not only of union, but *unity*. If we find such persons disputing and contending with each other, because they are ranged under different names, and occupy, for

a season, distinct parts of a vast and varied encampment, we can only say, “Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.”*

There are certain grand features of Scriptural truth so important, that no man can reject them but at the peril of his soul, and so clear, that no man can fairly read his Bible and not acknowledge them. There are other points of minor consequence, respecting which the evidences of Scripture are far more doubtful, and sometimes appear to be of almost equal strength, on either side. It is not surprising, therefore, that on these points, there should exist, among true Christians, a diversity of opinion; and this diversity may be permitted and *overruled* of the Lord, for wise and worthy purposes. May we not, therefore, adopt as our motto, an old and wise saying: “In essentials, *unity*; in non-essentials, *liberty*; in all things, *charity*?”†

* 2 Sam. i. 20.

† The celebrated John Locke thus addressed himself to two female friends who were of a different religious denomination from himself, but in whose society he had

The differences of opinion on secondary points of doctrine, and also of modes of worship and church government, existing among true Christians, are sometimes mentioned as one of the weapons of the infidel; *but they are a weapon not worth his using*. Although these diversities may in part arise from the ignorance and infirmity of man, it is not by them that the church of Christ is *disfigured* in the sight of its divine Master, but by the lingering remnants of pride, prejudice, and passion, in the individuals and classes of men, of whom it is composed.*

felt "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." "The more there is of this (unity) *in the life*, the less we need inquire of what nation, country, party, or persuasion our friends are, for our own knowledge is more sure to us than another's. Now, the God of all grace grant that you may hold fast that *rare grace of charity*, and choose that *unbiassed and unbounded law*, which, if it decay not, will spring up mightily as the waters of the sanctuary, higher and higher, until you, with the universal church, swim together in the ocean of Divine love."—*Manuscript Letter*.

* Some admirable remarks on this subject will be found in *Joyce on Love to God*, Appendix II. 3d edit.

When the temple of Solomon was to be erected, all the materials were in the first instance hewn into shape, and polished for their uses ; and when afterwards they had been put together, without a sound in the house of any tool of iron, beautiful was the harmony which resulted from their *fitness*. So would it be with Christians were they fully subject to that Divine power which would level their pride, abate their prejudice, and polish down their roughness. Their junction with him, on whom depends the security of the whole building, and their union with each other, would be more *complete* than it is at present. The holy temple would arise and spread in its true beauty and harmony ; and the inextinguishable flame of *love* would

p. 310. They are entitled, "Remarks on the Common Errors of Theological Controversy, &c." When speaking of party spirit in religion, Bishop Butler says, "It may be expected from all people, how much soever they are in earnest about their respective peculiarities, that humanity and common good-will to their fellow-creatures, should moderate and restrain that *wretched* spirit." —*Sermon on Love to our Neighbour*, xii.

diffuse a generous glow of warmth and brightness through the whole sacred edifice.*

It appears, then, *first*, that the benevolence of man towards man, can never assume a stable character until his love is primarily fixed on God; and that, therefore, in the two commandments, “Thou shalt love God,”

* Convinced as I am of the truth of these remarks, I am far from undervaluing *unanimity* among Christians, even on those points in religion which can by no means be regarded as essential to salvation. I believe that an unreserved submission to the power of God’s Spirit would, to a great extent, lead us into *unanimity* as well as *good fellowship*; for it is declared that the Comforter will guide the children of the Lord into “all truth.” The same end would be greatly promoted by an earnest endeavour on the part of every Christian to obtain a *comprehensive* and *impartial* view of Divine truth. We must not sit down to the study of Scripture, with minds biassed and pre-occupied by our own notions. In dependence on the Spirit by whom they were inspired, we must seek to be taught by the “prophets and apostles;” and we must take whatsoever they say, *as it comes*.

A partial view of truth is the first step to the worst of heresies. “Il y en a plusieurs,” says Pascal, “qui errent d’autant plus dangereusement, qu’ils prennent une vérité pour le principe de leur erreur. Leur faute n’est

“Thou shalt love thy neighbour,” there is not only succession, but *sequence*—that the *extent* of this commandment comprehends all mankind, and that the *measure* of it is the legitimate love of self—that we must show our obedience to it by rendering to all their

pas de suivre une fausseté ; mais de suivre une vérité à l'exclusion d'une autre. Il y a un grand nombre de vérités, et de foi et de morale, qui *semblent* répugnantes et contraires, et qui subsistent toutes dans un ordre admirable. La source de toutes les hérésies, est l'exclusion de quelques-unes de ces vérités. . . . C'est pourquoi le plus court moyen pour empêcher les hérésies, est d'instruire de toutes les vérités ; et le plus sur moyen de les réfuter, est de les déclarer toutes.”—“There are many persons who err so much the more dangerously because they take a truth as the principle of their error. Their fault is, not that they follow a falsehood, but that they follow one truth to the exclusion of another. There are a number of truths, both doctrinal and moral, which *appear* repugnant and contrary, but which, nevertheless, all subsist in an admirable order. The source of all heresies is the exclusion of *some* of these truths. Hence it appears that the shortest way to *prevent* heresies, is to instruct in *all* the truths of religion ; and the surest method of *refuting* heresies, is to declare all these truths.”—*Pensées*, xxviii.

dues ; by ministering to the wants of the poor and afflicted ; by the kindly tempers of universal charity ; and, above all, by labouring for the spiritual benefit of our fellow-men.

Secondly, That our fellow Christians stand in a peculiar relation towards us, and have, therefore, peculiar claims on our affections—that in proportion to the pre-eminence of God's favours to his church ought to be the pre-eminence of our love for its members—that deeds of kindness done to them are graciously accepted of the Lord, as done to himself—that Christians ought ever to be on the watch to exercise mutual forbearance, meekness, and charity, and to build up one another in their most holy faith—that their love is connected with *union* of experience, purpose, belief, and hope ; and, finally, that notwithstanding every diversity on minor points, it is at once the duty and happiness of all who hold the Head, to “ dwell together in *unity*.”

Now, as love to God leads to the love of our neighbour, as to a necessary consequence, so the latter reacts, with incalculable force, on our love to God. Such, as we have already seen, is the genuine operation of obedience to *all* the

commandments of the Lord ; for love prompts to obedience, and obedience increases love. But the remark applies with pre-eminent force to this branch of the divine law. The habitual and diligent exercise of the duties of benevolence has a vast effect in softening and widening the human mind. Thus it enlarges our capacity of loving all who are the proper objects of this affection, and especially Him who is its *supreme object*. The stream which flows first towards our heavenly Father, and from him is diffused over his sentient creatures, according to their respective relations to us, can never lose its original tendency. It only gathers strength and abundance in its course, and while it never fails to encircle its subordinate objects, it begins and ends with God himself. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his *love is perfected in us.*”*

* 1 John iv. 12.

“O Almighty God, inspire us with this divine principle (of love.) Kill in us all the seeds of envy and ill-will, and help us, by cultivating within ourselves the love of our neighbour, to improve in the love of thee. Thou hast placed us in various kindreds, friendships, and relations, as the school of discipline for our affections ;

Thus it appears, that obedience to the second great commandment, is one chosen means of confirming that pure love to God, without which our souls can never truly incline towards heaven, or be fitted for a participation in its pleasures. Yet there can be no doubt that the habit of benevolence and brotherly love, forms *in itself* an essential constituent of the joys of eternity. “*Charity never faileth.*”

“Then constant faith and holy hope shall die,
 One lost in certainty, and one in joy ;
 Whilst thou more happy power, fair charity,
 ‘Triumphant sister, greatest of the three,
Thy office and thy nature still the same,
 Lasting thy lamp, and unconsumed thy flame,
 Shalt still survive—
 Shalt stand before the host of heaven confest,
 Forever blessing, and forever blest.

PRIOR.

Heaven is a place of perfect rest from sin, labour, and sorrow ; but we can find no au-

help us, by the due exercise of them, to improve to perfection, until all partial affection be lost in that *entire universal one* ; and thou, O God, be ALL IN ALL.”—*Bishop Butler’s prayer at the end of Sermon on Love to our Neighbour.*

thority in Scripture for picturing it to ourselves as a region of *indolent repose*. On the contrary, we have every reason to believe that the more our faculties are improved, the more it will be our delight to *employ* them. Since the angels who never fell are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation,”* may we not believe that many an errand and office of mercy awaits the “spirits of the just made perfect?” Can it be doubted that *man*, when finally delivered from the weakness of the flesh, and from every spot of sin, while all his mental powers are renewed with heavenly vigour, will become a powerful instrument, in the Divine hand, for promoting the glory of his Maker, and the welfare of the rational universe?

But whatever may be the truth on this subject, it is certain, that as the condition of God’s people is social on earth, so also it is social in heaven—affording a boundless scope for the play of our best affections. This seems to be an inevitable inference from the nature of that moral discipline which the Creator has here allotted to us; for the pre-

* Heb. i. 14.

sent life, with all its varied relations, is a school for the affections; and it is as we are taught of the Lord to love Him with all the heart, and to love our neighbour as ourselves, that we are ripened for eternity. Again, it is the peculiar tendency of the gospel of Christ to draw forth and keep in action all the generous and tender sympathies of our nature; and what can be the *end* of this tendency but our becoming qualified for a world of love? But on this point the Scriptures are decisive; for they plainly represent the glorified children of the Lord as a people, a church, an assembly.* “The spirits of the just made perfect,” redeemed by the precious blood of Christ out “of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,” are no insulated beings, living individually in solitary independence. They are a united band—a vast association of minds in full accordance; all partaking of the same salvation, all serving the same Lord, all engaged in the same song of thanksgiving and praise.

When Moses and Elias came together to minister to the Lord Jesus on the mount,† a

* Heb. xii. 22, 23. Rev. v. 7—14; vii. 9—17.

† Matt. xvii. 3.

proof was given that the spirits of the departed are known to each other. The same truth may be elicited from many of our Lord's discourses. When he spoke of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, and described the conversation between the rich man in torments and Abraham in heaven;* when he promised that his followers, in the regeneration, should be assessors of his throne, guests at his table, and judges of the twelve tribes of Israel;† when he declared that “many should come from the east and west, and should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” in heavenly places; while the Jews, rejected because of their unbelief, should “*see*” those patriarchs, “*with all the prophets*,” in the kingdom of God;‡ when he represented himself, at the day of judgment, as appealing to those on whom he pronounces sentence, both as to their recollection of their past lives, and as to their knowledge of his brethren then assembled before him,§—he evidently gave *his sanction* to the commonly received doctrine, that in another world we shall remember

* Luke xvi. 22—31.

† Matt. xix. 28. Luke xxii. 30

‡ Luke xiii. 28.

§ Matt. xxv. 31—46.

the associations which we have formed on earth, and *shall perceive and recognise one another.*

In like manner the apostle Paul alludes to this doctrine, not as a matter liable to be questioned, but as a truth to be admitted and understood by those to whom he addressed himself. When he spoke of presenting his converts “as a chaste virgin to Christ,”* and declared that they would be his “joy” and crown of rejoicing, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming”†—when he said to the Corinthians, “knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall *present us with you*”‡—he was looking forward to the day when he should meet his brethren again before the throne of God, and when the connexion which he had maintained with them on earth should be perfected in celestial mansions.

Our Lord’s promise to the thief on the cross was, “To-day thou shalt be *with me* in paradise;” dying Stephen cried, “*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;*” and with Paul, to die, was “to depart and *to be with Christ.*”§ “I go

* 2 Cor. xi. 2.

† 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 14.

§ Phil. i. 23.

to prepare a place for you," said Jesus to his disciples ; " and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that *where I am there ye may be also.*"* Thus it appears that both immediately after death, and when their glory shall have been consummated by the resurrection, it will be the happiness of the Lord's children to find themselves in the immediate presence of Jesus, in intimate and holy communion with their glorified Saviour and King. In heaven we shall see Jesus as he is, and know him " even as we are known ;" and it must surely be regarded as a necessary consequence, that we shall see and know our brethren, who are all partakers of the same privilege, all gathered to the same centre.

The rending asunder of those tender ties which here bind us together in many a happy relationship, is the most sorrowful accompaniment of death ; but let us not be discouraged, for our Redeemer has secured for us a perfect victory over this " last enemy." For those who follow him, death will be abolished, and all its bitter consequences reversed ; every sorrow which it now occasions them will be turned

* John xiv. 2, 3 ; *comp.* 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.

into joy ! Christians, therefore, as the apostle assures us, must not sorrow for the loss of their friends, as others do “ which have no hope ; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them which *sleep in Jesus* will God bring with him.”* For a season, indeed, we are deprived of their cherished society ; but we shall see them again, we shall behold their faces in glory—unspeakably blessed will be our reunion with them in that region of light and love, where friends are no more parted !

Nor will our love, in that better world, be restricted to those whom we have known on earth. It will extend, as we have every reason to believe, to the wise, the just, and the good, of every generation ; and even to the several ranks and orders of angelic beings ; for all these belong to the same community ; they are all inhabitants of the same celestial city. While the varied members of that blessed and holy family maintain a perfect harmony of design and feeling, and are all employed in worshipping their God and Saviour, they cannot but gloriously realize their ONENESS in the Lord ; and they will be ONE in Him, to all eternity.

* 1 Thess. iv. 13, 14.

CONCLUSION.

It may possibly serve a useful purpose, if we concentrate the whole subject which we have now been discussing, in a few succinct propositions.

1. The main characteristic of those happy beings, who dwell in heaven under the immediate government of God our Saviour, is love towards the Supreme Being ; and this love is absolutely essential, both to their employments and their joys. On the contrary, the principal feature in the character of fallen man, is the absence of this love. Hence it follows, that before he can enter heaven, the affections of man must be changed—he must be born again of the Spirit.

2. The grand appointed instrument through which this change is effected, is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, in which are revealed

to us the mercies of God, for the restoration and final happiness of man. The gospel is "the power of God unto salvation."

3. It is the nature of all passive impressions on the mind of man, to become weaker as they are repeated; and this decay can be counteracted only by the formation of active principles. This truth applies to all our affections, and, amongst others, to that pure affection—love towards God; which will certainly wither in the soul, unless it be cultivated and carried forward into action. That divine grace by which our love to God is maintained, operates through this peculiar law of our nature; by the motive of love, it leads the soul into various acts; and by these acts our love is increased and confirmed.

4. One of the principal of them is, the contemplation of the Supreme Being. We ought to contemplate him, with humble-gratitude, as our Father by creation; as the bounteous Giver of all our faculties on the one hand, and of the various provisions of nature on the other, by which those faculties are suited; as the Supreme conductor of the chain of events, for the ultimate good and happiness of his

obedient children ; and, above all, as the Author of *redemption*.

5. In the scheme of redemption, the Deity displays himself to us as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit ; and the distinctive offices of these three, call for distinctive exertions, on our part, of heartfelt gratitude and affection. The more we reflect on the mercies of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit, so gloriously made manifest for the salvation of mankind, the more ardently shall we love the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—*one God blessed forever*.

6. “ God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.” The incarnation of the *Son of God*, and the sacrifice made for sin upon the cross, is the *centre* of the whole mighty scheme, ordained for the deliverance and happiness of man. To this point, therefore, above all others, ought our contemplation to be directed, that we may be constrained, by a view of such unparalleled mercy, to love the Lord *entirely and forever*.

7. A second act of the soul, fraught with a similar tendency, is, *communion with God*. We commune with the LORD, because we love

him; and the converse which we are permitted to hold with him in our solitary hours, in our family circles, in public worship, and during the whole course of our daily walk—while we pour forth our mind to him, and receive the impression of his mind in return—is a sure means of our being *taught* to love him more and more.

8. A third act of the soul, induced by love, and essential to its maintenance, is the surrender of ourselves, without reserve, to God. This surrender, which is inseparably connected with living, heartfelt faith, leads to resignation in suffering the will of God, and to obedience in doing it; and by every fresh exertion, either of resignation or obedience, our love to him is enhanced and strengthened.

9. As Christians, we are bound to love God, not merely because of the benefits bestowed upon ourselves, but because of his intrinsic moral perfections, so clearly displayed to us in the gospel; and if our love for him be sincere, it will excite in us an ardent desire to become *like him* in character. The restoration of fallen man to the image of his Creator, is the great practical purpose of the religion of Jesus—a

purpose which can be accomplished only as we follow the example of Jesus himself. Now, the greater advances we make in holiness, the livelier will be our sense of the "beauty" of Jehovah; the more we are assimilated to Christ, the nearer will be our union with the Father and with the Son.

10. The love of our neighbour follows the love of God as a necessary consequence; and it is itself essential to a right performance of all our duties towards our fellow-men. It dictates justice and charity towards all, and pre-eminent fervency of affection towards our fellow-Christians. Obedience to this commandment has a peculiar tendency to soften and enlarge the heart, and thus to improve our capacity for loving God himself—the supreme object of every pure affection.

While the acts of the soul which we have now been considering—contemplation, communion, submission, obedience, imitation of the Divine character, and the exercise of charity—strengthen that love to God which is the main qualification for the enjoyment of heaven, they severally form essential features in the employments or condition of the saints

in bliss. *They all belong to the one great system of future and eternal happiness.*

It appears, then, that as appointed means of increasing that divine affection, from which they spring, these several acts of the soul will forever continue to operate in the world to come. *Here* their influence is counteracted and weakened by innumerable obstructions—*there* it is exerted without the smallest hinderance, and in a far more exalted degree. Thus we may rest in a sure persuasion, that if we are graciously permitted an entrance, through the blood of Jesus, into heavenly mansions, our love to God will be *forever* increasing. The longer we contemplate his perfections, commune with him in spirit, obey his commandments, conform ourselves to his moral attributes, and exercise love towards his creatures, the more deeply and largely will our love towards Himself flow onward, and it will flow to all eternity.

There, while the golden ages roll,
And speed their ceaseless course,
And pleasure spreads from soul to soul
From an unfathom'd source ;

And contemplation's eye surveys,
From heights before untrod,
With silent, fixed, enraptured gaze,
The glories of our God ;

And sweet communion draws the tie
That binds us to the Lord,
And thrill the cords of sympathy,
Responsive to his word ;

And swift to do his high behest,
Each spirit wings her flight,
And virtue glows on every breast
A gem of purest light ;

And friendship lends her generous fires
To all that glorious throng,
Who join, with zeal that never tires,
In one harmonious song—

Love, in an ever-deepening tide,
O'er all the plains above
Spreads, like a sea immensely wide,
For God himself is Love.

The apostle Paul has shown us the connexion between being “rooted and grounded in love,” and comprehending “with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth,

and height;”* a connexion which must surely be experienced by glorified saints, in a far higher degree than by Christians upon earth. Hence it may be presumed, that just in proportion to the increase of our love to God, in the heavenly state, will be the enlargement of our faculties for the reception of divine knowledge, and for every wise and holy purpose. And with this enlargement of our spiritual capacities, will forever keep pace, as we may fully believe, the heightening of our joy. As there are in heaven different orders and stations of beings, and different degrees of glory—a doctrine often alluded to in Scripture—so we cannot fail to conclude from our premises, that the happiness of the “spirits of the just made perfect,” is *eternally progressive*.

While we rejoice with trembling, in the view of this amazing prospect, we ought not to cast a veil over its tremendous alternative. How awful is it to reflect on the opposite extremity! As love to God is forever on the increase in the souls of the blessed, so the contrary affection of aversion from the Fountain of all holiness, must have an inevitable

* Eph. iii. 17, 18.

tendency to become more and more aggravated, in the society of the devil and his angels, and in the regions of death, darkness, and pollution. And with this ever-widening distance of soul from the Author of all good, must, in the very nature of things, forever keep pace the increase of *woe*—"where their worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched."

Reader, if, notwithstanding the name of a Christian, thou art still a votary of this present world, following the vain devices and desires of thy own heart,—pause, I beseech thee, in thy mad career, and meditate for a few moments on the heights of heaven, and on the depths of hell. The curtains of the night will soon close around thee, and thy mental and moral condition, thy happiness or thy woe, will be fixed forever. Repent of thy transgressions; bring all the burden of thy sins and cast it at the feet of Jesus. "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." Wash thy polluted garments in the blood of his atonement: and cease to restrain the influences of his Holy Spirit. Embrace, in good earnest, the faith, the hope,

and the virtue of the Christian, and *live forever !*

Reader, if thou hast already made covenant with the Lord, to be his child and servant—if thou hast already been taught of the Spirit to love him who first loved thee—*persevere*. Fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life ; go forward on thy march towards Zion ; give thyself wholly to the disposal of Him who died for thee and rose again ; count nothing too near or too dear to part with for his name's sake ; follow the guidance of the Comforter in all things ; watch unto prayer ; be humble, be faithful, be diligent ; and *all will be well*. Christ will continue to be thy all-sufficient portion here ; and soon, very soon, it will be thy blessed lot to exchange his cross on earth for a crown of righteousness in heaven, immortal, incorruptible, and full of glory.

THE END.

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